The HUDSON REVIEW

From Poe to Valéry
T. S. ELIOT

Eliot's Moral Dialectic
HUGH KENNER

The Kingdom of Our Language
W. B. C. WATKINS

Mozart: Three Elevations
JOSEPH KERMAN

The N. R. A. C. P.
GEORGE P. ELLIOTT

Poetry: EDGAR BOWERS, ANTHONY HECHT, ELEANOR HESTHAL, JAMES MERRILL

Reviews: WILLIAM MEREDITH, HOWARD NEMEROV

Letter from England
B. RAJAN

Film Chronicle
GEORGE BARBAROW

VOLUME II, NUMBER 3 • AUTUMN, 1949

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

RARE and UNUSUAL RECORDS for CONNOISSEURS:

200 Years of Music in One Album

RALPH KIRKPATRICK

on the harpsichord:

GIBBONS
The Lord of Salisbury
The Queene's Command

MORLEY
Goe From My Window

PURCELL
Suite No. 1 in G Major
Suite No. 2 in G Minor
Lilliburlero

COUPERIN
Les Ombres Errantes
Les Baricades Mistérieuses
Les Vergers Fleuris
Le Carillon de Cithère

RAMEAU
La Villageoise
Le Rappel des Oiseaux
Rigaudons
Musette en Rondeau
Tambourin

BACH
Chromatic Fantasy and Fugue

SCARLATTI
Sonata in D Major (L.262)
Sonata in A Minor (L.429)

MUSICRAFT ALBUM 25
12—12" Sides
$7.19 Incl. Ex. Tax

ANDRES SEGOVIA

WORLD'S GREATEST GUITARIST
plays
BACH
CHACONNE

MUSICRAFT ALBUM 85
3—12" Sides
Fourth Side: GAVOTTE
$2.99 Incl. Ex. Tax

BACH SELECTIONS

MUSICRAFT ALBUM 90
4—12" Sides
$2.99 Incl. Ex. Tax

CARL WEINRICH

FOREMOST BAROQUE ORGANIST
THE ORGAN MUSIC OF
BUXTEHUDE

MUSICRAFT ALBUM 40
8—12" Sides
$5.09 Incl. Ex. Tax

BACH
TOCCATAS AND FUGUES

MUSICRAFT ALBUM 36
8—12" Sides
$5.09 Incl. Ex. Tax

BACH
PRELUDES AND FUGUES

MUSICRAFT ALBUM 80
6—12" Sides
$4.04 Incl. Ex. Tax

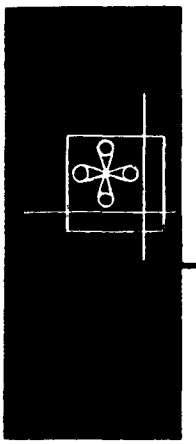
One free record complimentary with every album ordered. Write for gift certificate, listing rare and out-of-print bonus records. Complete catalogue on request.

SEND CHECK OR MONEY ORDER TO:

Personal Record Service

163 WEST FOURTH STREET, NEW YORK 14, N. Y.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED



1949

JOSEPH CAMPBELL	17	*THE HERO WITH A THOUSAND FACES* — *Illustrated, $4.00*
GLADYS A. REICHARD	18	*NAVAHO RELIGION: A Study of Symbolism* — *$7.50*
RICHARD WILHELM– C. F. BAYNES translation	19	*THE BOOK OF CHANGES (I CHING)* *Introduction by C. G. Jung* *2 Volumes* — *$7.50*
ALFRED SCHAER	21	*RELIGION AND THE SOUL IN JUNG'S PSYCHOTHERAPY* *Translated by R. F. C. Hull* — *$3.50*
C. G. JUNG and **C. KERENYI**	22	*ESSAYS ON A SCIENCE OF MYTHOLOGY* *Translated by R. F. C. Hull* *Illustrated, $4.00*
ANDRE MALRAUX	24	*PSYCHOLOGY OF ART* *Translated by Stuart Gilbert* *2 Volumes, 220 Illustrations* — *$25.00*

BOLLINGEN SERIES

Distributed by PANTHEON BOOKS, INC.
333 SIXTH AVENUE, NEW YORK 14

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The 15th ANNUAL

HOUGHTON MIFFLIN COMPANY

Literary Fellowship Contest

These Fellowships which are designed to help promising young writers are $2400 each. Manuscripts may be submitted at any time during the year. Those not found eligible for a Fellowship or for publication will be returned within a reasonable amount of time from the date they were submitted. Two awards are offered each year, either for fiction or non-fiction. Applications will be received up to January 1st, 1950. For details write to Houghton Mifflin Company, 2 Park Street, Boston 7, Mass.

THE IMPORTANCE OF SCRUTINY Edited by Eric Bentley

Allen Tate says: "THE IMPORTANCE OF SCRUTINY is the most important collection of group criticism in English of this century. This group, under the brilliant leadership of F. R. Leavis, is the most important school of critics today." $5.75

THE GREAT TRADITION By F. R. Leavis

John Farrelly says: "a book wide in range and at the same time refreshingly specific . . . not only does the book provide a corrective to 'the inertia of conventional valuating' of the novelists considered, but it is one of the very first-rate works on the art of fiction." $4.50

EDUCATION AND THE UNIVERSITY By F. R. Leavis

Ordway Tead says: "Were there many more embarked upon university instruction who believe as this author does, the quality of education would need to concern us less." $2.75

REVALUATION By F. R. Leavis

Arthur Mizener says "one of the most sustained and intelligent attacks on the problem of criticism, in the Arnoldian sense . . . in our lifetime." $3.75

EXPLORATIONS By L. C. Knights

Robert Daniel says: "Knights has not received from us the recognition accorded to Richards and Empson, with whom he should be ranked. Let us hope that the publication of these essays as a book will correct this fault in our knowledge." $3.00

GEORGE W. STEWART, PUBLISHER, INC. 109 EAST 39TH STREET, NEW YORK 16

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

THE HUDSON REVIEW

Volume II, Number 3 • Autumn, 1949

Comment		325
From Poe to Valéry	T. S. ELIOT	327
The Kingdom of Our Language	W. B. C. WATKINS	343
Two Poems	ANTHONY HECHT	377
New Forest (verse)	ELEANOR HESTHAL	380
The NRACP (story)	GEORGE P. ELLIOTT	381
Two Poems	JAMES MERRILL	418
Eliot's Moral Dialectic	HUGH KENNER	421
Two Poems	EDGAR BOWERS	449
CHRONICLES		
Bloomsbury and the Academies	B. RAJAN	451
Mozart: Three Elevations	JOSEPH KERMAN	458
Film Chronicle	GEORGE BARBAROW	467
REVIEWS		
Every Poem an Epitaph	WILLIAM MEREDITH	473
Passion and Form	HOWARD NEMEROV	477

EDITORS: *Joseph Bennett, Frederick Morgan*

ENGLISH EDITOR: *William Arrowsmith*

MANAGING EDITOR: *Catharine Carver*

ASSOCIATE EDITORS: *Cornelia Claiborne, Robert Wise*

THE HUDSON REVIEW is published quarterly by The Hudson Review, Inc., 39 West 11th Street, New York 11, N. Y. Address communications to The Hudson Review, P.O. Box 45, Village Station, New York 14, N. Y. Subscriptions $3 per year; Canada, $3.50; foreign, $4. Single copy, $1; in Canada, $1.15. U. S. distributor: The Eastern News Co., 200 East 67th St., New York 21, N. Y. New York City distributor: J. M. Blanke, 110 West 42nd St., New York 18, N. Y. Representative in England: William Arrowsmith, The Queen's College, Oxford. Rates in England: Subscriptions £1 per year; single copy, 5s. Manuscripts will not be returned unless accompanied by stamped, self-addressed envelopes. Copyright 1949 by The Hudson Review, Inc. Registered U. S. Patent Office. Entered as second-class matter June 25, 1948 at the Post Office at New York, New York, under the Act of March 3, 1879.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Book Mss. Welcomed

Every author delights in a best seller, but even a book with a limited audience can prove profitable when expertly designed and promoted. Though we, too, delight in best sellers, we are interested chiefly in reaching the audience for the worthy mss. of more modest prospects. Such books, which include first novels, poetry, plays, essays, scholarly works and the like, fail to attract other publishers because high production costs and overhead make them less profitable than sure-fire volumes by established writers. Under our plan, however, we publish such books and enable our authors to profit from the sale of a relatively small number of copies. Our authors receive unbounded cooperation from understanding editors in a program designed to insure the widest sale of books, no matter what their scope. We cordially invite you to submit your ms., or, if you prefer, write first for our free Booklet E.

VANTAGE PRESS INC.

35 So. William St., New York 4

THE HUDSON REVIEW

Back copies available:

Spring 1948 (Vol. I, No. 1) 75c
Blackmur, Stevens, Read, Cummings, Schorer, Comfort, etc.

Summer 1948 (Vol. I, No. 2) $1.00
Burke, Blackmur, Gordon, Bishop, Fergusson, Frank, etc.

Autumn 1948 (Vol. I, No. 3) 75c
Mann, Blackmur, Tate, Richards, Moore, Merton, etc.

Winter 1949 (Vol. I, No. 4) 75c
Winters, Kenner, Jackson, Troy, Michaux, Welty, etc.

Spring 1949 (Vol. II, No. 1) $1.00
Welty, Frank, Winters, Empson, Brooks, Hyman, Young, etc.

Complete set of Volume I (4 issues) now $3.00

NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

T. S. Eliot's new play, *The Cocktail Party*, was produced this fall at the Edinburgh Festival.

W. B. C. Watkins' essay is part of a book, *Shakespeare and Spenser*, to be published soon by the Princeton University Press.

Anthony Hecht is presently at work on a book of poems.

Eleanor Hesthal lives in San Francisco.

George P. Elliott, a Californian, has published poems and stories in several magazines.

James Merrill is a young poet living in New York City.

Hugh Kenner is at work on a book on James Joyce, a chapter of which appeared in the winter 1949 HUDSON REVIEW.

Edgar Bowers is a graduate student at Stanford University.

B. Rajan is editor of the English magazine *Focus*.

Joseph Kerman teaches at the Westminster Choir College in Princeton, N. J.

George Barbarow, who lives near Los Angeles, has just finished a book on film art.

William Meredith has published two volumes of poetry.

Howard Nemerov's novel *The Melodramatists*, was published last spring.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Comment

THE ATTACKS by the *Saturday Review of Literature* on the Fellows in American Letters of the Library of Congress constitute the most unscrupulous attempt that has been made here in recent years to discredit a group of serious writers, and serious writing in general. To attack the judgment of one's literary opponents is one thing; to "smear" them, with no show of evidence, as Fascists working to undermine American democracy is quite another. Neither in the original articles by Robert Hillyer, nor in the *Saturday Review's* supporting editorials, is there to be found the smallest scrap of evidence or shadow of a fact to put in the scales against the distinguished record of the Fellows. On the contrary, the articles are built up of cowardly insinuations, and are filled with inaccuracies. The *Saturday Review* has already published a number of retractions, that are in themselves sufficient to indicate the dishonorable opportunism of the original attacks.

One can understand Mr. Hillyer. The spectacle of a man who is a failure as a poet, and sufficiently mean-spirited to vent his venom on the eminent and the successful, may be sickening, but it is not uncommon. The conduct of the *Saturday Review* is equally contemptible and still more irresponsible. Is it conceivable that a reputable magazine, interested only in the truth, would print such damaging insinuations without the most careful investigation and accumulation of proof? We are forced to conclude that the *Saturday Review* is not the disinterested champion of truth which it pretends to be. The clue to its behavior may be seen in the attempt to implicate in the alleged conspiracy (always without the citing of facts) a large but unspecified group of "new critics" and "obscurantist poets." What this amounts to is that the *Saturday Review,* and Mr. Hillyer, would like to write off, as Fascist or un-American, all persons whose work they do not like or cannot comprehend, and all who admire such work; the next step, of course, would be to have such persons liquidated. We suggest that the gentlemen make a study of the notion of guilt by association, which is so

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

strongly invoked in Mr. Hillyer's articles; they will discover, what a number of their readers have already pointed out to them, that this habit of thought has never been dear to democratic societies, but to those of very different persuasion. We do not fear Fascism when a jury of experts, voting each according to the dictates of his conscience, makes an unpopular award; we do fear it when an organized attempt is made to penalize such a jury, by blackening the reputations of its members, for performing the eminently democratic function of judging a case on its own merits.

In a statement which has been circulated as a press release by the Library of Congress, the Fellows have made reply to the *Saturday Review* attacks. Their statement, which unlike Mr. Hillyer's articles is full of facts, meets each of his insinuations and utterly demolishes his "charges." However, although the attacks on the Fellows received wide publicity, their reply, perhaps because it is compounded of fact and logic rather than sensationalism and abuse, has not. According to the democratic principle that accused persons have the right of full and detailed reply to every charge before the tribunal at which they stand accused, it would seem that the *Saturday Review* should feel honor-bound to print this reply by the Fellows, in full, without distortion. It is not impossible, however, that it would require more honor and courage than can be mustered up by that journal to admit to its readers that it has abused them by spreading an ugly slander. The statement was received by us too late for inclusion in this issue. If the *Saturday Review* chooses to overlook it, and if plans are not made for its wider dissemination, it will appear in our Winter number, regardless of our other commitments, in the interests of justice.

At a future date, we shall publish a discussion of Ezra Pound's poetry, and of certain questions that have been legitimately raised by the award. Our purpose for the moment is to point out that the award has been used, by Mr. Hillyer and the *Saturday Review*, as a pretext for an attack on the Fellows, and on other unspecified writers, that is unscrupulous and unfounded.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

*From Poe to Valéry**

T. S. ELIOT

WHAT I ATTEMPT here is not a judicial estimate of Edgar Allan Poe; I am not trying to decide his rank as a poet or to isolate his essential originality. Poe is indeed a stumbling block for the judicial critic. If we examine his work in detail, we seem to find in it nothing but slipshod writing, puerile thinking unsupported by wide reading or profound scholarship, haphazard experiments in various types of writing, chiefly under pressure of financial need, without perfection in any detail. This would not be just. But if, instead of regarding his work analytically, we take a distant view of it as a whole, we see a mass of unique shape and impressive size to which the eye constantly returns. Poe's influence is equally puzzling. In France the influence of his poetry and of his poetic theories has been immense. In England and America it seems almost negligible. Can we point to any poet whose style appears to have been formed by a study of Poe? The only one whose name immediately suggests itself is—Edward Lear. And yet one cannot be sure that one's own writing has *not* been influenced by Poe. I can name positively certain poets whose work has influenced me, I can name others whose work, I am sure, has not; there may be still others of whose influence I am unaware, but whose influence I might be brought to acknowledge; but about Poe I shall never be sure. He wrote very few poems, and of those few only half a dozen have had a great success: but those few are as well known to as large a number of people, are as well remembered by everybody, as any poems ever written. And some of his tales have had an important influence upon authors, and in types of writing where such influence would hardly be expected.

*Copyright 1948, by T. S. Eliot. Published by permission of the author, the Library of Congress, and Harcourt, Brace and Company.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

I shall here make no attempt to explain the enigma. At most, this is a contribution to the study of his influence; and an elucidation, partial as it may be, of one cause of Poe's importance in the light of that influence. I am trying to look at him, for a moment, as nearly as I can, through the eyes of three French poets, Baudelaire, Mallarmé and especially Paul Valéry. The sequence is itself important. These three French poets represent the beginning, the middle and the end of a particular tradition in poetry. Mallarmé once told a friend of mine that he came to Paris because he wanted to know Baudelaire; that he had once seen him at a bookstall on a quai, but had not had the courage to accost him. As for Valéry, we know from the first letter to Mallarmé, written when he was hardly more than a boy, of his discipleship of the elder poet; and we know of his devotion to Mallarmé until Mallarmé's death. Here are three literary generations, representing almost exactly a century of French poetry. Of course, these are poets very different from each other; of course, the literary progeny of Baudelaire was numerous and important, and there are other lines of descent from him. But I think we can trace the development and descent of one particular theory of the nature of poetry through these three poets and it is a theory which takes its origin in the theory, still more than in the practice, of Edgar Poe. And the impression we get of the influence of Poe is the more impressive, because of the fact that Mallarmé, and Valéry in turn, did not merely derive from Poe through Baudelaire: each of them subjected himself to that influence directly, and has left convincing evidence of the value which he attached to the theory and practice of Poe himself. Now, we all of us like to believe that we understand our own poets better than any foreigner can do; but I think we should be prepared to entertain the possibility that these Frenchmen have seen something in Poe that English-speaking readers have missed.

My subject, then, is not simply Poe but Poe's effect upon three French poets, representing three successive generations; and my purpose is also to approach an understanding of a peculiar attitude towards poetry, by the poets themselves, which is perhaps

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

the most interesting, possibly the most characteristic, and certainly the most original development of the esthetic of verse made in that period as a whole. It is all the more worthy of examination if, as I incline to believe, this attitude towards poetry represents a phase which has come to an end with the death of Valéry. For our study of it should help towards the understanding of whatever it may be that our generation and the next will find to take its place.

Before concerning myself with Poe as he appeared in the eyes of these French poets, I think it as well to present my own impression of his status among American and English readers and critics; for, if I am wrong, you may have to criticise what I say of his influence in France with my errors in mind. It does not seem to me unfair to say that Poe has been regarded as a minor, or secondary, follower of the Romantic Movement: a successor to the so-called "Gothic" novelists in his fiction, and a follower of Byron and Shelley in his verse. This however is to place him in the English tradition; and there certainly he does not belong. English readers sometimes account for that in Poe which is outside of any English tradition, by saying that it is American; but this does not seem to me wholly true either, especially when we consider the other American writers of his own and an earlier generation. There is a certain flavour of provinciality about his work, in a sense in which Whitman is not in the least provincial: it is the provinciality of the person who is not at home where he belongs, but cannot get to anywhere else. Poe is a kind of displaced European; he is attracted to Paris, to Italy and to Spain, to places which he could endow with romantic gloom and grandeur. Although his ambit of movement hardly extended beyond the limits of Richmond and Boston longitudinally, and neither east nor west of these centres, he seems a wanderer with no fixed abode. There can be few authors of such eminence who have drawn so little from their own roots, who have been so isolated from any surroundings.

I believe the view of Poe taken by the ordinary cultivated English or American reader is something like this: Poe is the au-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

thor of a few, a very few short poems which enchanted him for a time when he was a boy, and which do somehow stick in the memory. I do not think that he re-reads these poems, unless he turns to them in the pages of an anthology; his enjoyment of them is rather the memory of an enjoyment which he may for a moment recapture. They seem to him to belong to a particular period when his interest in poetry had just awakened. Certain images, and still more certain rhythms, abide with him. This reader also remembers certain of the tales—not very many—and holds the opinion that *The Gold Bug* was quite good for its time, but that detective fiction has made great strides since then. And he may sometimes contrast him with Whitman, having frequently re-read Whitman, but not Poe.

As for the prose, it is recognised that Poe's tales had great influence upon some types of popular fiction. So far as detective fiction is concerned, nearly everything can be traced to two authors: Poe and Wilkie Collins. The two influences sometimes concur, but are also responsible for two different types of detective. The efficient professional policeman originates with Collins, the brilliant and eccentric amateur with Poe. Conan Doyle owes much to Poe, and not merely to Monsieur Dupin of *The Murders in the Rue Morgue*. Sherlock Holmes was deceiving Watson when he told him that he had bought his Stradivarius violin for a few shillings at a second-hand shop in the Tottenham Court Road. He found that violin in the ruins of the house of Usher. There is a close similarity between the musical exercises of Holmes and those of Roderick Usher: those wild and irregular improvisations which, although on one occasion they sent Watson off to sleep, must have been excruciating to any ear trained to music. It seems to me probable that the romances of improbable and incredible adventure of Rider Haggard found their inspiration in Poe—and Haggard himself had imitators enough. I think it equally likely that H. G. Wells, in his early romances of scientific exploration and invention, owed much to the stimulus of some of Poe's narratives—*Gordon Pym,* or *A Descent into the Maelstrom* for example, or *The Facts in the Case of Monsieur Valdemar*. The compila-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

tion of evidence I leave to those who are interested to pursue the enquiry. But I fear that nowadays too few readers open *She* or *The War of the Worlds* or *The Time Machine:* fewer still are capable of being thrilled by their predecessors.

What strikes me first, as a general difference between the way in which the French poets whom I have cited took Poe, and the way of American and English critics of equivalent authority, is the attitude of the former towards Poe's *œuvre,* towards his work as a whole. Anglo-Saxon critics are, I think, more inclined to make separate judgements of the different parts of an author's work. We regard Poe as a man who dabbled in verse and in several kinds of prose, without settling down to make a thoroughly good job of any one *genre.* These French readers were impressed by the variety of form of expression, because they found, or thought they found, an essential unity; while admitting, if necessary, that much of the work is fragmentary or occasional, owing to circumstances of poverty, frailty and vicissitude, they nevertheless take him as an author of such seriousness that his work must be grasped as a whole. This represents partly a difference between two kinds of critical mind; but we must claim, for our own view, that it is supported by our awareness of the blemishes and imperfections of Poe's actual writing. It is worth while to illustrate these faults, as they strike an English-speaking reader.

Poe had, to an exceptional degree, the feeling for the incantatory element in poetry, of that which may, in the most nearly literal sense, be called "the magic of verse." His versification is not, like that of the greatest masters of prosody, of the kind which yields a richer melody, through study and long habituation, to the maturing sensibility of the reader returning to it at times throughout his life. Its effect is immediate and undeveloping; it is probably much the same for the sensitive schoolboy and for the ripe mind and cultivated ear. In this unchanging immediacy, it partakes perhaps more of the character of very good *verse* than of poetry—but that is to start a hare which I have no intention of following here, for it is, I am sure, "poetry" and not "verse." It

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

has the effect of an incantation which, because of its very crudity, stirs the feelings at a deep and almost primitive level. But, in his choice of the word which has the right *sound*, Poe is by no means careful that it should have also the right *sense*. I will give one comparison of uses of the same word by Poe and by Tennyson—who, of all English poets since Milton, had probably the most accurate and fastidious appreciation of the sound of syllables. In Poe's *Ulalume*—to my mind one of his most successful, as well as typical, poems—we find the lines

It was night, in the lonesome October
Of my most immemorial year.

Immemorial, according to the Oxford Dictionary, means: "that is beyond memory or out of mind; ancient beyond memory or record: extremely old." None of these meanings seems applicable to this use of the word by Poe. The year was not beyond memory—the speaker remembers one incident in it very well; at the conclusion he even remembers a funeral in the same place just a year earlier. The line of Tennyson, equally well known, and justly admired because the sound of the line responds so well to the sound which the poet wishes to evoke, may already have come to mind:

The moan of doves in immemorial elms.

Here *immemorial*, besides having the most felicitous sound value, is exactly the word for trees so old that no one knows just how old they are.

Poetry, of different kinds, may be said to range from that in which the attention of the reader is directed primarily to the sound, to that in which it is directed primarily to the sense. With the former kind, the sense may be apprehended almost unconsciously; with the latter kind—at these two extremes—it is the sound, of the operation of which upon us we are unconscious. But, with either type, sound and sense must cooperate; in even the most purely incantatory poem, the dictionary meaning of words cannot be disregarded with impunity.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

An irresponsibility towards the meaning of words is not infrequent with Poe. *The Raven* is, I think, far from being Poe's best poem; though, partly because of the analysis which the author gives in *The Philosophy of Composition,* it is the best known.

In there stepped a stately Raven of the saintly days of yore,

Since there is nothing particularly saintly about the raven, if indeed the ominous bird is not wholly the reverse, there can be no point in referring his origin to a period of saintliness, even if such a period can be assumed to have existed. We have just heard the raven described as *stately;* but we are told presently that he is *ungainly,* an attribute hardly to be reconciled, without a good deal of explanation, with *stateliness.* Several words in the poem seem to be inserted either merely to fill out the line to the required measure, or for the sake of a rhyme. The bird is addressed as "no craven" quite needlessly, except for the pressing need of a rhyme to "raven"—a surrender to the exigencies of rhyme with which I am sure Malherbe would have had no patience. And there is not always even such schoolboy justification as this: to say that the lamplight "gloated o'er" the sofa cushions is a freak of fancy which, even were it relevant to have a little gloating going on somewhere, would appear forced.

Imperfections in *The Raven* such as these—and one could give others—may serve to explain why *The Philosophy of Composition,* the essay in which Poe professes to reveal his method in composing *The Raven*—has not been taken so seriously in England or America as in France. It is difficult for us to read that essay without reflecting, that if Poe plotted out his poem with such calculation, he might have taken a little more pains over it: the result hardly does credit to the method. Therefore we are likely to draw the conclusion that Poe in analysing his poem was practising either a hoax, or a piece of self-deception in setting down the way in which he wanted to think that he had written it. Hence the essay has not been taken so seriously as it deserves.

Poe's other essays in poetic esthetic deserve consideration also. No poet, when he writes his own *art poétique,* should hope to do

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

much more than explain, rationalise, defend or prepare the way for his own practice: that is, for writing his own kind of poetry. He may think that he is establishing laws for all poetry; but what he has to say that is worth saying has its immediate relation to the way in which he himself writes or wants to write: though it may well be equally valid to his immediate juniors, and extremely helpful to them. We are only safe in finding, in his writing about poetry, principles valid for any poetry, so long as we check what he says by the kind of poetry he writes. Poe has a remarkable passage about the impossibility of writing a long poem—for a long poem, he holds, is at best a series of short poems strung together. What we have to bear in mind is that he himself was incapable of writing a long poem. He could conceive only a poem which was a single simple effect: for him, the whole of a poem had to be in one mood. Yet it is only in a poem of some length that a variety of moods can be expressed; for a variety of moods requires a number of different themes or subjects, related either in themselves or in the mind of the poet. These parts can form a whole which is more than the sum of the parts; a whole such that the pleasure we derive from the reading of any part is enhanced by our grasp of the whole. It follows also that in a long poem some parts may be deliberately planned to be less "poetic" than others: these passages may show no lustre when extracted, but may be intended to elicit, by contrast, the significance of other parts, and to unite them into a whole more significant than any of the parts. A long poem may gain by the widest possible variations of intensity. But Poe wanted a poem to be of the first intensity throughout: it is questionable whether he could have appreciated the more philosophical passages in Dante's *Purgatorio*. What Poe had said has proved in the past of great comfort to other poets equally incapable of the long poem; and we must recognize that the question of the possibility of writing a long poem is not simply that of the strength and staying power of the individual poet, but may have to do with the conditions of the age in which he finds himself. And what Poe has to say on the subject is illuminating, in helping us to understand the point of view of poets for whom the long poem is impossible.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The fact that for Poe a poem had to be the expression of a single mood—it would here be too long an excursus to try to demonstrate that *The Bells,* as a deliberate exercise in several moods, is as much a poem of one mood as any of Poe's—this fact can better be understood as a manifestation of a more fundamental weakness. Here, what I have to say I put forward only tentatively: but it is a view which I should like to launch in order to see what becomes of it. My account may go to explain, also, why the work of Poe has for many readers appealed at a particular phase of their growth, at the period of life when they were just emerging from childhood. That Poe had a powerful intellect is undeniable: but it seems to me the intellect of a highly gifted young person before puberty. The forms which his lively curiosity takes are those in which a pre-adolescent mentality delights: wonders of nature and of mechanics and of the supernatural, cryptograms and cyphers, puzzles and labyrinths, mechanical chess-players and wild flights of speculation. The variety and ardour of his curiosity delight and dazzle; yet in the end the eccentricity and lack of coherence of his interests tire. There is just that lacking which gives dignity to the mature man: a consistent view of life. An attitude can be mature and consistent, and yet be highly sceptical: but Poe was no sceptic. He appears to yield himself completely to the idea of the moment: the effect is, that all of his ideas seem to be *entertained* rather than believed. What is lacking is not brain power, but that maturity of intellect which comes only with the maturing of the man as a whole, the development and coordination of his various emotions. I am not concerned with any possible psychological or pathological explanation: it is enough for my purpose to record that the work of Poe is such as I should expect of a man of very exceptional mind and sensibility, whose emotional development has been in some respect arrested at an early age. His most vivid imaginative realisations are the realisation of a dream: significantly, the ladies in his poems and tales are always ladies lost, or ladies vanishing before they can be embraced. Even in *The Haunted Palace,* where the subject appears to be his own weakness of alcoholism, the disaster has no moral significance; it is treated impersonally as an isolated phe-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

nomenon; it has not behind it the terrific force of such lines as those of François Villon when he speaks of his own fallen state.

Having said as much as this about Poe, I must proceed to enquire what it was that three great French poets found in his work to admire, which we have not found. We must first take account of the fact that none of these poets knew the English language very well. Baudelaire must have read a certain amount of English and American poetry: he certainly borrows from Gray, and apparently from Emerson. He was never familiar with England, and there is no reason to believe that he spoke the language at all well. As for Mallarmé, he taught English and there is convincing evidence of his imperfect knowledge, for he committed himself to writing a kind of guide to the use of the language. An examination of this curious treatise, and the strange phrases which he gives under the impression that they are familiar English proverbs, should dispel any rumour of Mallarmé's English scholarship. As for Valéry, I never heard him speak a word of English, even in England. I do not know what he had read in our language: Valéry's second language, the influence of which is perceptible in some of his verse, was Italian.

It is certainly possible, in reading something in a language imperfectly understood, for the reader to find what is not there; and when the reader is himself a man of genius, the foreign poem read may, by a happy accident, elicit something important from the depths of his own mind, which he attributes to what he reads. And it is true that in translating Poe's prose into French, Baudelaire effected a striking improvement: he transformed what is often a slipshod and a shoddy English prose into admirable French. Mallarmé, who translated a number of Poe's poems into French prose, effected a similar improvement: but on the other hand, the rhythms, in which we find so much of the originality of Poe, are lost. The evidence that the French overrated Poe because of their imperfect knowledge of English remains accordingly purely negative: we can venture no farther than saying that they were not disturbed by weaknesses of which we are very much aware. It does not account for their high opinion of Poe's *thought,* for the

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

value which they attached to his philosophical and critical exercises. To understand that we must look elsewhere.

We must, at this point, avoid the error of assuming that Baudelaire, Mallarmé and Valéry all responded to Poe in exactly the same way. They are great poets, and they are each very different from the other; furthermore, they represent, as I have reminded you, three different generations. It is with Valéry that I am here chiefly concerned. I therefore say only that Baudelaire, to judge by his introduction to his translation of the tales and essays, was the most concerned with the personality of the man. With the accuracy of his portrait I am not concerned: the point is that in Poe, in his life, his isolation and his worldly failure, Baudelaire found the prototype of *le poète maudit,* the poet as the outcast of society—the type which was to realise itself, in different ways, in Verlaine and Rimbaud, the type of which Baudelaire saw himself as a distinguished example. This nineteenth-century archetype, *le poète maudit,* the rebel against society and against middle-class morality (a rebel who descends of course from the continental myth of the figure of Byron) corresponds to a particular social situation. But, in the course of an introduction which is primarily a sketch of the man Poe and his biography, Baudelaire lets fall one remark indicative of an esthetic that brings us to Valéry:

> He believed [says Baudelaire], true poet that he was, that the goal of poetry is of the same nature as its principle, and that it should have nothing in view but itself.

"A poem does not say something—it *is* something": that doctrine has been held in more recent times.

The interest for Mallarmé is rather in the technique of verse, though Poe's is, as Mallarmé recognises, a kind of versification which does not lend itself to use in the French language. But when we come to Valéry, it is neither the man nor the poetry, but the *theory* of poetry, that engages his attention. In a very early letter to Mallarmé, written when he was a very young man, introducing himself to the elder poet, he says: "I prize the theories of Poe, so profound and so insidiously learned; I believe in the omnipotence

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

of rhythm, and especially in the suggestive phrase." But I base my opinion, not primarily upon this credo of a very young man, but upon Valéry's subsequent theory and practice. In the same way that Valéry's poetry, and his essays on the art of poetry, are two aspects of the same interest of his mind and complement each other, so for Valéry the poetry of Poe is inseparable from Poe's poetic theories.

This brings me to the point of considering the meaning of the term "la poésie pure": the French phrase has a connotation of discussion and argument which is not altogether rendered by the term "pure poetry."

All poetry may be said to start from the emotions experienced by human beings in their relations to themselves, to each other, to divine beings, and to the world about them; it is therefore concerned also with thought and action, which emotion brings about, and out of which emotion arises. But, at however primitive a stage of expression and appreciation, the function of poetry can never be simply to arouse these same emotions in the audience of the poet. You remember the account of Alexander's feast in the famous ode of Dryden. If the conqueror of Asia was actually transported with the violent emotions which the bard Timotheus, by skilfully varying his music, is said to have aroused in him, then the great Alexander was at the moment suffering from automatism induced by alcohol poisoning, and was in that state completely incapable of appreciating musical or poetic art. In the earliest poetry, or in the most rudimentary enjoyment of poetry, the attention of the listener is directed upon the subject matter; the effect of the poetic art is felt, without the listener being wholly conscious of this art. With the development of the consciousness of language, there is another stage, at which the auditor, who may by that time have become the reader, is aware of a double interest in a story for its own sake, and in the way in which it is told: that is to say, he becomes aware of style. Then we may take a delight in discrimination between the ways in which different poets will handle the same subject; an appreciation not merely of better or worse, but of differences between styles which are equally ad-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

mired. At a third stage of development, the subject may recede to the background: instead of being the purpose of the poem, it becomes simply a necessary means for the realisation of the poem. At this stage the reader or listener may become as nearly indifferent to the subject matter as the primitive listener was to the style. A complete unconsciousness or indifference to the style at the beginning, or to the subject matter at the end, would however take us outside of poetry altogether: for a complete unconsciousness of anything but subject matter would mean that for that listener poetry had not yet appeared; a complete unconsciousness of anything but style would mean that poetry had vanished.

This process of increasing self-consciousness—or, we may say, of increasing consciousness of language—has as its theoretical goal what we may call *la poésie pure*. I believe it to be a goal that can never be reached, because I think that poetry is only poetry so long as it preserves some "impurity" in this sense: that is to say, so long as the subject matter is valued for its own sake. The Abbé Brémond, if I have understood him, maintains that while the element of *la poésie pure* is necessary to make a poem a poem, no poem can consist of *la poésie pure* solely. But what has happened in the case of Valéry is a change of attitude toward the subject matter. We must be careful to avoid saying that the subject matter becomes "less important." It has rather a different kind of importance: it is important as *means:* the *end* is the poem. The subject exists for the poem, not the poem for the subject. A poem may employ several subjects, combining them in a particular way; and it may be meaningless to ask "What is the subject of the poem?" From the union of several subjects there appears, not another subject, but the poem.

Here I should like to point out the difference between a theory of poetry propounded by a student of esthetics, and the same theory as held by a poet. It is one thing when it is simply an account of how the poet writes, without knowing it, and another thing when the poet himself writes consciously according to that theory. In affecting writing, the theory becomes a different thing from what it was merely as an explanation of how the poet writes. And Valéry was a poet who wrote very consciously and de-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

liberately indeed: perhaps, at his best, not wholly under the guidance of theory; but his theorising certainly affected the kind of poetry that he wrote. He was the most self-conscious of all poets.

To the extreme self-consciousness of Valéry must be added another trait: his extreme scepticism. It might be thought that such a man, without belief in anything which could be the subject of poetry, would find refuge in a doctrine of "art for art's sake." But Valéry was much too sceptical to believe even in art. It is significant, the number of times that he describes something he has written as an *ébauche*—a rough draft. He had ceased to believe in *ends*, and was only interested in *processes*. It often seems as if he had continued to write poetry, simply because he was interested in the introspective observation of himself engaged in writing it: one has only to read the several essays—sometimes indeed more exciting than his verse, because one suspects that he was more excited in writing them—in which he records his observations. There is a revealing remark in *Variété V*, the last of his books of collected papers: "As for myself, who am, I confess, much more concerned with the formation or the fabrication of works [of art] than with the works themselves," and, a little later in the same volume: "In my opinion the most authentic philosophy is not in the objects of reflection, so much as in the very act of thought and its manipulation."

Here we have, brought to their culmination by Valéry, two notions which can be traced back to Poe. There is first the doctrine, elicited from Poe by Baudelaire, which I have already quoted: "A poem should have nothing in view but itself"; second the notion that the composition of a poem should be as conscious and deliberate as possible, that the poet should observe himself in the act of composition—and this, in a mind as sceptical as Valéry's, leads to the conclusion, so paradoxically inconsistent with the other, that the act of composition is more interesting than the poem which results from it.

First, there is the "purity" of Poe's poetry. In the sense in which we speak of "purity of language" Poe's poetry is very far from pure, for I have commented upon Poe's carelessness and unscru-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

pulousness in the use of words. But in the sense of *la poésie pure,* that kind of purity came easily to Poe. The subject is little, the treatment is everything. He did not have to achieve purity by a process of purification, for his material was already tenuous. Second, there is that defect in Poe to which I alluded when I said that he did not appear to believe, but rather to entertain, theories. And here again, with Poe and Valéry, extremes meet, the immature mind playing with ideas because it had not developed to the point of convictions, and the very adult mind playing with ideas because it was too sceptical to hold convictions. It is by this contrast, I think, that we can account for Valéry's admiration for *Eureka*—that cosmological fantasy which makes no deep impression upon most of us, because we are aware of Poe's lack of qualification in philosophy, theology or natural science, but which Valéry, after Baudelaire, esteemed highly as a "prose poem." Finally, there is the astonishing result of Poe's analysis of the composition of *The Raven.* It does not matter whether *The Philosophy of Composition* is a hoax, or a piece of self-deception, or a more or less accurate record of Poe's calculations in writing the poem; what matters is that it suggested to Valéry a method and an occupation—that of observing himself write. Of course, a greater than Poe had already studied the poetic process. In the *Biographia Literaria* Coleridge is concerned primarily, of course, with the poetry of Wordsworth; and he did not pursue his philosophical enquiries concurrently with the writing of his poetry; but he does anticipate the question which fascinated Valéry: "What am I doing when I write a poem?" Yet Poe's *Philosophy of Composition* is a *mise au point* of the question which gives it capital importance in relation to this process which ends with Valéry. For the penetration of the poetic by the introspective critical activity is carried to the limit by Valéry, the limit at which the latter begins to destroy the former. M. Louis Bolle, in his admirable study of this poet, observes pertinently: "This intellectual narcissism is not alien to the poet, even though he does not explain the whole of his work: 'why not conceive as a work of art the production of a work of art?' "

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Now, as I think I have already hinted, I believe that the *art poétique* of which we find the germ in Poe, and which bore fruit in the work of Valéry, has gone as far as it can go. I do not believe that this esthetic can be of any help to later poets. What will take its place I do not know. An esthetic which merely contradicted it would not do. To insist on the all-importance of subject-matter, to insist that the poet should be spontaneous and irreflective, that he should depend upon inspiration and neglect technique, would be a lapse from what is in any case a highly civilised attitude to a barbarous one. We should have to have an esthetic which somehow comprehended and transcended that of Poe and Valéry. This question does not greatly exercise my mind, since I think that the poet's theories should arise out of his practice rather than his practice out of his theories. But I recognise first that within this tradition from Poe to Valéry are some of those modern poems which I most admire and enjoy; second, I think that the tradition itself represents the most interesting development of poetic consciousness anywhere in that same hundred years; and finally I value this exploration of certain poetic possibilities for its own sake, as we believe that all possibilities should be explored. And I find that by trying to look at Poe through the eyes of Baudelaire, Mallarmé and most of all Valéry, I become more thoroughly convinced of his importance, of the importance of his *work* as a whole. And, as for the future: it is a tenable hypothesis that this advance of self-consciousness, the extreme awareness of and concern for language which we find in Valéry, is something which must ultimately break down, owing to an increasing strain against which the human mind and nerves will rebel; just as, it may be maintained, the indefinite elaboration of scientific discovery and invention, and of political and social machinery, may reach a point at which there will be an irresistible revulsion of humanity and a readiness to accept the most primitive hardships rather than carry any longer the burden of modern civilisation. Upon that I hold no fixed opinion: I leave it to your consideration.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The Kingdom of Our Language

W. B. C. WATKINS

SPENSER, SO COUNTER to present taste, might appear in the stocks more often if he seemed to our critics important enough.[1] Only Mr. William Van O'Connor has recently troubled to pillory him:

> In the first four lines Spenser presents the theme:
>
> *Oft when my spirit doth spred her bolder winges*
> *In mind to mount up to the purest sky,*
> *It down is weighd with thoght of earthly things,*
> *And clogd with burden of mortality:*
>
> In the next four lines the reader expects to find some exploration of the theme, but finds, instead, simply further statement:
>
> *Where, when that soverayne beauty it doth spy,*
> *Resembling heavens glory in her light,*
> *Drawne with sweet pleasures bayt, it back doth fly,*
> *And unto heaven forgets her former flight.*
>
> In the well constructed lyric one would expect in the last lines to discover the intellectual resolution. Here, however, there is no dramatic emotional situation to be resolved. There is merely further explanation couched in terms of graceful tribute:
>
> *There my fraile fancy, fed with full delight,*
> *Doth bath in blisse, and mantleth most at ease;*
> *Ne thinks of other heaven, but how it might*
> *Her harts desire with most contentment please.*
> *Hart need not wish none other happinesse,*
> *But here on earth to have such hevens blisse.*
>
> The difference between the poems of Herrick and Stevens and Spenser is the distinction between the poetry of exploration and the poetry of exposition. Herrick and Stevens present material for the reader to

[1] An exception is the perceptive appreciation of Spenser in Mr. Donald Stauffer's *Nature of Poetry*.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

> *work* through; Spenser presents an imagined experience unequivocally stated. There is in the first two poems an intellectual and emotional problem to be settled in terms of the materials presented. Spenser, as a Christian, represents and illustrates a Christian attitude; he does not *re-experience* it. He does not *earn* his attitude.[2]

This does not arouse spirited defense of the *Amoretti,* of all Spenser's mature poems the least exciting, especially if one agrees that Herrick's *Mad Maid's Song* and Stevens' *Peter Quince at the Clavier* are finer poems than this particular sonnet. The sonnet, however, is in its way well constructed and contains more of the qualities which Mr. O'Connor demands than he seems to realize. It is not dramatic, yet there is more sinew in the convolutions of its neo-Platonic thought than casually appears; there is even more surprise and tension, since underlying the whole sonnet is the pull between heaven and earth. The first four lines express the soul's aspirations heavenward defeated by mortality; the next four are statement, but "exploratory statement" essential to particularize "mortality," showing the soul, snared by desire, accepting a substitute heaven. The octave leaves us with a sense of true heaven forgotten in earthly illusion. The opening lines of the sestet, expatiating on this earthly bliss, are the only part of the poem which can be dismissed as merely "further explanation," since the concluding couplet suddenly reverses the neo-Platonism and the *substitute* nature of earthly love, proclaiming the paradox of heaven on earth. In thus forcing a system of philosophy to bow to his mistress Spenser shows no intense spiritual conflict; he stays, as he intends to stay, within the bounds of graceful, playful tribute. Is there no room in poetry for this?

But the implications in Mr. O'Connor's complaint, reaching beyond a casually chosen sonnet, disturb me more than his disparagement of Spenser—particularly certain basic assumptions: the "well constructed lyric," a formula reminiscent of the "well made play"; the necessity for an "intellectual resolution" to a "dramatic emotional situation." The lyric, seemingly, not only *must be* dramatic; it should be "an intellectual and emotional problem" to be solved, "an attitude to be earned."

[2]"Tension and Structure of Poetry," *Sewanee Review,* Autumn 1943.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Mr. O'Connor's is indisputably a voice of our time, and his preferences speak at least in part for many of us. In rejecting poetry like this sonnet because it lacks intensity, compression, drama, our generation is doing very much what Shakespeare and his fellows did. But if most of the Elizabethans forsook the *Amoretti* vein (Spenser with them), they by no means forsook all that Spenser accomplished and stood for in poetry, nor did they define drama so narrowly. The danger of present-day criticism, which has done so much to vindicate "inclusive" poetry, is of slipping unaware into an exclusive view, a new absolutism. Dr. Johnson sitting in judgment on the Metaphysicals is having the tables turned, while we risk freezing our own poetic taste into a set of neo-Metaphysical rules. Overly partial to the dramatic, we are likely to ignore not only narrative, which the poets have surrendered to the novelists, but the interdependence of narrative and drama.

A greater poetic passage than this sonnet of Spenser's is also "unequivocally stated":

Nature that fram'd us of foure Elements,
Warring within our breasts for regiment,
Doth teach us all to have aspyring minds:
Oure soules, whose faculties can comprehend
The wondrous Architecture of the world;
And measure every wandring plannets course,
Still climing after knowledge infinite,
And alwaies moving as the restles Spheares,
Wills us to weare our selves and never rest,
Untill we reach the ripest fruit of all,
That perfect blisse and sole felicitie,
The sweet fruition of an earthly crowne.

Marlowe, not yet himself mature, is writing in a still immature form—English drama, and with a shackled grandeur that no one wishes edited by a Bentley. Marlowe's weakness is not exposition and statement, which he never abandons, though he develops in the direction of drama; his weakness is imperfect articulation, since the potentially fine structure of the passage is faulty. As in Spenser's sonnet, the aspiring soul stoops to earthly fruition; but

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

heaven and earth are not in balance. While in this instance we prefer Marlowe's failure to Spenser's success, Spenser at least achieves his end. It is the end which leaves us cold.

We have lost pleasure in the purely formal; and it is precisely the formal statement of three themes one after the other, then combined at the end, which gives the opening sonnet of the *Amoretti* (a simpler, more uncompromising example than Mr. O'Connor's choice) the effect of a thematic musical exercise:

> Happy ye leaves *when as those lilly hands,*
> *which hold my life in their dead doing might,*
> *shall handle you and hold in loves soft bands,*
> *lyke captives trembling at the victors sight.*
> *And* happy lines, *on which with starry light,*
> *those lamping eyes will deigne sometimes to look*
> *and reade the sorrowes of my dying spright,*
> *written with teares in harts close bleeding book,*
> *And* happy rymes *bath'd in the sacred brooke,*
> *of Helicon whence she derived is,*
> *when ye behold that Angels blessed looke,*
> *my soules long lacked foode, my heavens blis,*
> Leaves, lines, *and* rymes, *seek her to* please *alone,*
> whom if ye please, I care for other none.

This is low in emotional key, not intense, not exciting. Yet this is all that Spenser set out to accomplish—simple but expert statement, contrived in a pattern of intricate verbal sounds so skillful that only careful analysis would reveal it. The balance of meaning and sound is maintained, however; internal and external rhymes, alliteration, assonance do not blur the statement, or, as with Swinburne, hypnotize us so that meaning seems not to matter.

This kind of formality, with its description and exposition, lends itself to drama better than one might suppose. In Richard Second's last soliloquy is a conceit latently metaphysical, but sighs and tears and groans are used as formal elements of structure:

> *For now hath time made me his numbering clock:*
> *My thoughts are minutes; and with* sighs *they jar*

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Their watches on unto mine eyes, the outward watch,
Whereto my finger, like a dial's point,
Is pointing still, in cleansing them from tears.
Now sir, the sound that tells what hour it is
Are clamorous groans, *which strike upon my heart,*
Which is the bell: so sighs *and* tears *and* groans
Show minutes, times, *and* hours: *but my time*
Runs posting on in Bolingbroke's proud joy,
While I stand fooling here, his Jack o' the clock.

Though like Marlowe Shakespeare shortly moves away from Spenser toward more dramatic condensation of thought and feeling, he never abandons the formal, which we find metamorphosed in the technique of *King Lear*.

Richard's transitional soliloquies are predominantly lyrical statement, though especially in this instance the intellectual element (itself formal) is prominent. The kinship to Spenser and the difference from him are highlighted if we compare a stanza from Arthur's soliloquy to Night after fruitless pursuit of Florimell and sleep:

But well I wote, that to an heavy hart
Thou art the root and nurse of bitter cares,
Breeder of new, renewer of old smarts:
In stead of rest thou lendest rayling teares,
In stead of sleepe thou sendest troublous feares,
And dreadfull visions, in the which alive
The drearie image of sad death appeares:
So from the wearie spirit thou doest drive
Desired rest, and men of happiness deprive.

Both soliloquies are reflective, but Richard's is introspective and analytical to a degree not true of Arthur's, which is of course more stylized. Richard's conceits forecast metaphysical wit; Arthur's play on words is not the kind of verbal extravagance typical at this period of Shakespeare, but closer to the felicity of phrase admired by Jonson, later by Dryden, Pope, and Johnson. Not by paradox, but by placement and natural emphasis in the line, *new* and *old* are contrasted and assimilated to *smarts; old* and *new* are reconciled in *renew*.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

This stanza reveals two of Spenser's primary technical faults, which he must share the responsibility of propagating among his followers through the centuries: the loosening of structure by excessive particles and auxiliaries, and the weak epithet. "Drearie image" and "wearie spirit" rely too much on the adjective, though Spenser is more justified than many of his followers because he is clearly composing for the ear: besides the double alliteration (*dr*eadfull-*dr*earie), *drearie* and *wearie* contribute internal rhyme to an elaborate sound pattern. On the credit side is a mastery of words which this adjectival weakness may obscure, and a control of syntax which Marlowe and even Shakespeare were some time in rivaling. Spenser's sentence unfolds with ease in the confines of his complex stanza.

Rather than defend Spenser from specific charges, some of which he deserves, it will be more profitable to consider his poetic craftsmanship in relation to Shakespeare's. Like Shakespeare he has range and variety; he is master of more than one style. Heretofore no one—not even Shakespeare—has had a more catholic appeal to the *profession*. Besides shoals of minor poets, among his debtors are Marlowe, Shakespeare, Milton, Dryden, Pope, Thomson, Burns, Wordsworth, Keats, Byron, Shelley, Tennyson, Yeats. In bearing the responsibilities of this eminence (several of these poets show up his weaknesses), he should be judged with perspective.

Spenser has not stood the test of time so well as Shakespeare; much of his work, like Jonson's, requires historical orientation for full understanding; some is unrecoverable. None the less, he and Shakespeare represent two great traditions, narrative and dramatic, two primary ways of using language, direct and oblique; furthermore, while thus supplementary, they are in many ways complementary. No other two taken together so fully represent the achievement of English poetry. The technical triumph of the Elizabethan age and the richness of its poetic language cannot be illustrated by Shakespeare alone, or by Shakespeare in combination with any other poet than Spenser.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

II

The *Shepheardes Calender* is an aqueduct flung back across the morass of Tudor poetry to Chaucer, the "well of English undefyled." In that morass are several streams of fine poetry—Dunbar, Skelton, Wyatt, Surrey, Sackville. Some lost themselves. Skelton wandered merrily into the rushes. A few found their way back into the main current—Surrey and Sackville through Spenser; Wyatt through Sidney's sonnets, Shakespeare, and Donne. Though in his *Induction* Sackville demonstrated an astonishing mastery, which he could not repeat, and Wyatt left a handful of first rate poems, on the whole the Tudor efforts at reclamation were premature. Wyatt had the originality and power, but lacked the skill; Surrey had the skill, but lacked originality and power. Spenser had all three, plus faith and audacity and will.

Five editions in Spenser's lifetime indicate that the poets read the *Shepheardes Calender* even if they did not always know the author's identity, and profited even when they did not altogether approve. To recognize Spenser's influence only among the so-called Spenserians—Drayton, the Fletchers, Drummond—is myopic; it has never been limited to kindred spirits nor to mere imitation. Spenser's intense concern with the craft and medium of poetry makes him a focal figure; to ignore or neglect him is to distort the whole tradition.

This problem of words—not just vocabulary, but syntax, words in meaningful patterns—occupied Spenser even when he was in the Merchant Taylors' School, where the admirable and lively Mulcaster spread joy in his native tongue. Earlier humanists, if they did not like More write primarily in Latin, deplored the poverty of English. Poetry (or those who felt responsible for it) was scrambling after classic prosody from a real sense of the inadequacy of poulter's measure, and from a false scorn of barbaric rhyme and beat. Spenser was sufficiently impressed to quibble with Harvey and Dyer over the quantitative values of homely English syllables, over troublesome vowels already dissolving into

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

diphthongs or virtually disappearing into a common sound. In *September* he makes Diggon complain:

> *Then playnely to speak of shepheards most what*
> *Badde is the best* (this English is flat).

But this conventional protest is off-key in a poem which is a proclamation of emancipation. "Why, a God's name may we not have the kingdom of our language?" Spenser explodes to Harvey in 1581.

He met Harvey's objection by pointing to Marot and Bellay, who had determinedly caught up with the Italians, and to Chaucer, who had made the English of his day sufficient for great poetry. None could complain of the expressiveness of Chaucer, however rough his meter in a faulty text wrongly read. Though Mr. C. S. Lewis, somewhat overwhelmed by Ariosto, still maintains that "his discipleship to Chaucer exists only in profession, not in practice," Spenser's tributes to Chaucer are more than nationalistic bravura. The poet who had already mastered a slightly artificial but thoroughly English style (in contrast to Milton) in the *Shepheardes Calender,* where continental influences are classical and French, not Italian, and in *Mother Hubberds Tale,* before he progressed very far on the first draft of the *Faerie Queene,* learns many new devices of narration and transition from Ariosto, but does not unlearn his language.

Even in his archaisms, paralleling the procedure of Bellay, Spenser follows Chaucer's example in selecting from contemporary dialects outside London more than he pillages Chaucer's Middle English. These archaisms Sidney in a neo-classical moment censures long before Jonson; even E. K. (with Spenser conniving) is conciliatory. Like most innovators Spenser goes too far. But he is consciously seeking words, homely as well as elevated, of fresher and more precise meaning. Many of his resurrections are stillborn; others survive till later poets strangle them. He abandons his extreme archaism, just as he repeats only three of the thirteen metrical forms, ten of which were first introduced to the Elizabethans in the *Calender.*

Spenser learns more from Chaucer than judicious selection of

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

current dialects—the importance of skillfully handled syntax, the metrical value of the short syllable, effective for melodic purposes and for swift-moving, effortless narrative. With an equal predilection for description and meditation, like Chaucer he is capable also of dramatic narration when it suits his purpose. As he matures Spenser becomes more restrained in his borrowings, more skillful in adaptation, in taking over language principles rather than special practices. And with a swiftness more remarkable, though less famous, than Marlowe's lightning development of blank verse, Spenser molds a style that is rich, varied, fluid, adaptable to racy, homely satire and to conversational directness, as well as to the elegant formality of the *Amoretti* or the lofty idealism of the *Faerie Queene*. Since drama evolves from narrative, it is not surprising to find in Spenser's early poetry, if we trouble to look, a mastery of colloquial verse and dialogue unsurpassed in the drama for another fifteen years.

These bold borrowings, adaptations, innovations in language and metrical form point the way for the rest of the Elizabethans. His successes justify his failures. Shakespeare has as many faults of abuse and excess. Othello asks that Desdemona be sent to him,

> *With such accommodation and* besort
> *As levels with her breeding.*

When Prospero wants Miranda to see Ferdinand approaching, he says:

> *The fringed curtains of thine eyes advance*
> *And say what thou seest yond.*

Isolated, these speeches are slightly ridiculous. In their context they create a deliberate remoteness—Othello, noble, exotic; Prospero, long exiled from his kind, stately master of his own rare world. Similarly, Spenser's language is adapted to the creation of the special world of the *Faerie Queene*, though even there and everywhere in his minor poems he introduces colloquialism as daringly as Shakespeare, or Mr. Eliot, or Mr. Auden. Abstractions and personifications are frequent in Shakespeare as in Spenser, and neither hesitates to make up words or twist old words to new meanings.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Spenser's language is more consistent than Shakespeare's, but each poet alters diction and syntax according to the effect he desires. In the considerable exposition of thought and action in his plays Shakespeare resorts to direct statement; few maintain, except by implication, that on these occasions poetry flies out of the window. In his complex allegory Spenser not only writes most of the time in elaborate metaphor; he also uses language dramatically at crucial points in his story, and repetitive imagery is as essential to his symbolism as to Shakespeare's mature plays. There is a large area in the use of language where they overlap. But in general we may say that Spenser exemplifies the direct, logical statement of the narrative tradition going back to Chaucer and enriched by Ariosto and Tasso; Shakespeare the oblique statement, the double or triple meaning, the elliptical phrase of drama. Spenser secures a cumulative effect by slow elaboration; Shakespeare intensity by the greatest possible compression.

The direct statement, the denotative use of language, has been in ill repute among poets and critics, except for a few like Mr. Eliot, since the end of the nineteenth century; the explicit has been abandoned to prose. In using *implicit* and *explicit,* as Miss Josephine Miles remarks, we should remember that what becomes through familiarity explicit was less so perhaps when first written. The terms are slippery and will remain so until the semanticists lead us out of the wilderness. In distinguishing so far as one can in brief space these two uses of language, I shall limit myself primarily, not systematically, to diction, syntax, figure, and imagery. The first two bring us at once to "the qualities which good verse shares with good prose." Syntax provides an index not only to the logical processes of the mind but to the structure of the sensibility.[3]

Chaucer's hand in Spenser's syntax and narrative style is evident in such fables as the Oak and the Briar in *Februarie,* the Kid and the Fox in *May;* but is most apparent in *Mother Hubberds Tale,* written about 1580 though unpublished for ten years. Spenser promises a plain, unvarnished tale:

[3]In a short poem like a sonnet structure is frequently only the syntax of a sentence adjusted to the form; the quality of the sentence is the quality of the poem.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

No Muses aide me needes hereto to call;
Base is the style, and matter meane withall.

It is a fabliau, supposedly told by a "plain, good woman." Spenser does not pretend to capture in the telling the psychology of the narrator, as Wordsworth, with only partial success, was to do later in poems like *The Thorn*. Mother Hubberd is used merely for a certain flavor, and skillfully Chaucerianized Elizabethan for the purportedly "base" style:

It was the month, in which the righteous Maide,
That for disdaine of sinfull worlds upbraide,
Fled back to heaven, whence she was first conceived,
Into her silver bowre the Sunne received;
And the hot Syrian Dog on him awayting,
After the chased Lyons cruell bayting,
Corrupted had th'ayre with his noysome breath,
And powr'd on th'earth plague, pestilence, and death.
Amongst the rest a wicked maladie
Raign'd amongst men, that manie did to die,
Depriv'd of sense and ordinarie reason;
That it to Leaches seemed strange and geason.
My fortune was mongst manie others moe,
To be partakers of their common woe;
And my weake bodie set on fire with griefe,
Was rob'd of rest, and naturall reliefe.
In this ill plight, there came to visite mee
Some friends, who sorie my sad case to see,
Began to comfort me in chearfull wise,
And meanes of gladsome solace to devise.
But seeing kindly sleep refuse to doe
His office, and my feeble eyes forgoe,
They sought my troubled sense how to deceave
With talke, that might unquiet fancies reave
And sitting all in seates about me round,
With pleasant tales (fit for that idle stound)
They cast in course to waste the wearie howres. . . .

In this simple magic of straightforward, unpretentious story-telling in verse Spenser recaptures a power lost since Chaucer, a

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

style as old as poetry, as new as any present. The unobtrusive intimacy and personal tone, so different from the Romantics, of the opening device is at once that of the folk tale of common origin and of the highly sophisticated frame of the Platonic dialogues, to which Tudor and early Elizabethan prose pieces like the *Utopia*, the *Schoolmaster*, the *Defense of Poesy* also owe their peculiar charm. For if Chaucer is in the immediate background, one feels in *Mother Hubberds Tale* the interfusion of centuries of tradition in folklore and philosophic meditation.

Spenser gets on with his story:

Whilome (said she) before the world was civill,
The Foxe and th' Ape disliking of their evill
And hard estate, determinéd to seeke
Their fortunes farre abroad, lyeke with his lyeke:
For both were craftie and unhappie witted;
Two fellowes might no where be better fitted.
The Foxe, that first this cause of griefe did finde,
Gan first thus plaine his case with words unkinde,
Neighbour Ape, and my Gossip eke beside,
(Both two sure bands in friendship to be tide,)
To whom may I more trustelý complaine
The evill plight, that doth me sore constraine,
And hope thereof to finde due remedie?
Heare then my paine and inward agonie.
Thus manie yeares I now have spent and worne,
In meane regard, and basest fortunes scorne,
Doing my Country service as I might,
No lesse I dare saie than the prowdest wight;
And still I hoped to be up advancéd,
For my good parts; but still it hath mischauncéd.
Now therefore that no lenger hope I see
But froward fortune still to follow mee,
And losels lifted high, where I did looke,
I meane to turne the next leafe of the booke.

The verse flows into the crannies of character and the vagaries of dialogue with undiminished ease. We hardly notice that our simple

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

story has now assumed two simultaneous levels—beast and human—and is beginning to develop overtones of social and political satire. The ridicule of the self-righteous, envious grumbler, determined no longer to acquiesce, is so timeless that topical reference can be either ignored or supplied from any contemporary scene.

These couplets are free-flowing. There is no sign of strain in the adjustment of sentence to metrical pattern; while the sentences are frequently complex, they are clear and straightforward. That they are not more closely knit is attributable to the deliberately colloquial style rather than to any failure in structural sense. Speech rhythms are adjusted to the meter with skill and variety, producing considerable variation in the beats of the line (trochees for iambs) without destroying the fundamental rhythmic pattern. The frequent enjambment is chiefly on unaccented syllables, but occasionally on accented:

Amongst the rest a wicked maladie
Raign'd amongst men, that manie did to die.

But Spenser does not depend too much on enjambment for fluidity. The syntax of the Fox's speech shows that it is not built up line by line, but conceived as a whole; we are carried through the passage by the structure of thought more than by mechanical devices. Even the alliterative pattern here—no mere decorative "searching the letter"—seems a characteristic rhetorical trick of speech in the glib Fox; "froward fortune" and "losels lifted high" are the stock proverbial phrases of the demagogue, and the homely figure of the last line, as abrupt as his decision, is individual flavor. Colloquial rhythm pervades the narrative as well as the dialogue and is apparent from the beginning.

Many of the qualities which we associate with dramatic verse are equally the property of narrative, and Spenser had fully mastered those qualities in the couplet long before the dramatists learned to loosen the bonds of blank verse. This gift of poetic speech so admirably adapted to drama Spenser uses sparingly in the *Faerie Queene,* but in a few instances he evolves some ten years before *King Lear* a terse poetic dialogue not unlike Goner-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

il's.[4] And his colloquial rhythms from 1579 on are taken up at once by the sonneteers beginning with Sidney, partly through them passing on to the dramatists.

Spenser's master in this familiar style, so far as he needed one, is clear from this portrait in a consciously Chaucerian manner:

Which when the Priest beheld, he view'd it nere,
As if therin some text he studying were,
But little else (God wote) could thereof skill:
For read he could not evidence, nor will,
Ne tell a written word, ne write a letter,
Ne make one title worse, ne make one better:
Of such deep learning little had he neede,
Ne yet of Latine, ne of Greeke, that breede
Doubts mongst Divines, and difference of texts,
From which arise diversitie of sects,
And hatefull heresies, of God abhor'd:
But this good Sir did follow the plaine word,
Ne medled with their controversies vaine,
All his care was, his service well to saine,

---

[4]For example, *F. Q.* 5.6:

Even in the dore him meeting, she begun:
'And where is thy Lord, and how far hence?
Declare at once; and hath he lost or won?'

. . . . . .

Till she againe thus sayd: 'Talus be bold,
And tell what ever it be, good or bad,
That from thy tongue thy hearts intent doth hold.'

To whom he thus, at length. 'The tidings sad,
That I would hide, will needs, I see, be rad.
My Lord, your love, by hard mishap doth lie
In wretched bondage, wofully bestad.'

'Ay me,' *quoth she,* 'what wicked destinie?
And is he vanquisht by his tyrant enemy?'

'Not by that Tyrant, his intended foe;
But by a Tyrannesse,' *he then replied,*
'That him captived hath in haplesse woe.'

'Cease thou bad newes-man, badly doest thou hide
Thy maisters shame, in harlots bondage tide.
The rest my selfe too readily can spell.'
With that in rage she turn'd from him aside. . . .

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

And to read Homelies upon holidayes:
When that was done, he might attend his playes.

The shifts of pace and variety of pauses here are admirable, playing speech rhythm against metrical beat or making them skillfully coincide:

All his care was/his service well to saine.

This satirical analysis of the priest's ignorance is a rationalization in semi-soliloquy, with its bewilderment, its slight hesitations followed by rush of words. The satire is all the better for being equivocal, poised between self-righteousness and discomfort; the priest is undermined by his inability to "follow the plaine word" except so far as he has learned his text and homilies by rote. Indignation is softened by sly humor. At other times Spenser's scorn is full of sheer animal spirits, anticipating Samuel Butler:

The Pasport ended, both they forward went,
The Ape clad Souldierlike, fit for th'intent,
In a blew jacket (?) with a crosse of redd
And manie slits, as if that he had shedd
Much blood through many wounds therein receaved,
Which had the use of his right arme bereaved;
Upon his head an old Scotch cap he wore,
With a plume feather all to peeces tore:
His breeches were made after the new cut,
Al Portugese, *loose like an emptie gut.*

But most of all, Spenser as a satirist is the Elizabethan Dryden, for Dryden is closer in temper to Spenser than to his great follower, Pope. The kinship is in basic humanity and generosity, largeness of view, easy vigor, and verve. Occasionally Spenser strikes the very quality which is to be pre-empted by Dryden as "raillery"; good nature tempers satire which is not so much wit as a kind of exuberant fun:

Be you the Souldier, for you likest are
For manly semblance, and small skill in warre.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Yet Mr. Eliot calls Dryden "a successor of Jonson, and therefore the descendant of Marlowe." And Mr. Oscar Campbell in his study of Elizabethan satire ignores Spenser altogether. Outside the drama, no Elizabethan satirist, not even Donne, is greater than Spenser, who also happens to be one of the few masters of the familiar style in English poetry.

Spenser maintains the same fluency when he lays aside the couplet for ottava rima in *Muiopotmos: the Fate of the Butterflie,* which also deserves rescue from the dreary *Complaints.* The changes in diction and style are determined not by the stanza, but by the demands of mock-heroic, as delicate and skillful as the *Rape of the Lock,* another poem in debt to Spenser, who himself never forgot *Sir Thopas.* Such phrases as "deadly dolorous debate" are partly self-satire in this burlesque of epic and the heroic style:

I sing of deadly dolorous debate,
Stirr'd up through wrathfull Nemesis despight,
Betwixt two mightie ones of great estate,
Drawne into armes, and proofe of mortall fight,
Through prowd ambition, and hart swelling hate,
Whilest neither could the others greater might
And sdeignfull scorne endure; that from small jarre
Their wraths at length broke into open warre.

The roote whereof and tragicall effect,
Vouchsafe, O thou the mournfulst Muse of nyne,
That wontst the tragick stage for to direct,
In funerall complaints and waylfull tyne,
Reveale to me, and all the meanes detect,
Through which sad Clarion did at last declyne
To lowest wretchedness; and is there then
Such rancour in the harts of mightie men?

These two opening stanzas are a triumph of "straight-face" comedy. They are poetically fine enough to be taken as serious poetry, and, as in all great mock-heroic, this serious poetic quality is essential to the complex effect. The next stanza, by giving away the heroes, announces the parody already caught by the subtle ear.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

At first glance, the opening of *Muiopotmos* seems to be composed line by line like *Tamburlaine,* until the sudden overflow into the seventh and eighth lines. But Elizabethan punctuation is misleading. While such devices as the strong initial beat of the fourth line modify the rhythm and prevent monotony, it is the syntax which prevents looseness and the deadliness of end-stopped verse. This structural unity is clearer in the second stanza, where the more convoluted sentence shows careful arrangement of primary and subordinate clauses and postponement of verbs. Placement of *vouchsafe* and *reveale* and reliance on grammatical logic (instead of repeating subject of the second verb) suggest that condensation is to Spenser a means to secure structure rather than intensity. Furthermore, the position of the opening phrase (*whereof* ties in directly with *warre*) and the inversion make the sense continuous, so that the two stanzas are really one. Such technical virtuosity was certainly not lost on Milton, who, together with Spenser, teaches Pope the difficult art of weaving self-contained heroic couplets into "paragraphs."

This organic unity differs from the almost mathematically formal structure of the first *Amoretti* sonnet. Both types of structure are found in the *Faerie Queene,* where the verse ranges from elaboration to simplicity. Any of Spenser's direct addresses to the reader, so frequent at the opening of a canto, illustrates a mastery of simple statement as marked as *Mother Hubberds Tale,* though completely different in tempo and quality:

> *The noble hart, that harbours vertuous thought,*
> *And is with child of glorious great intent,*
> *Can never rest, untill it forth have brought,*
> *Th'eternall brood of glorie excellent:*
> *Such restlesse passion did all night torment*
> *The flaming corage of that Faery knight,*
> *Devizing, how that doughtie turnament*
> *With greatest honour he atchieven might;*
> *Still did he wake, and still did watch for dawning light.*

This is equally admirable as prose or poetry. With the exception of the inversion in the eighth line, there is nothing unnatural or

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

forced in syntax perfectly fitted into the confines of an exacting stanza; there is no conflict between metrical demands and meaning, but the poise of reconciliation.

We are no longer geared to the leisurely unfolding of the *Faerie Queene*. We read it too rapidly, partly under the psychological oppression of its length; consequently to most it has a monotony which more carefully spaced reading dissipates. Spenser is to be read aloud for delight as well as profit; only when approached thus does the richness and variety of his art unfold. And if we turn from the first six books to the *Mutabilitie Cantos*, we find a change in his style so great as to make it difficult to see how these two cantos, supposedly the core of a Seventh Book, could have been successfully brought into focus with the rest.

In the *Mutabilitie Cantos* is little suggestion of Ariosto or Tasso. Romance-epic shifts from romance to epic. Diction and style have greater simplicity and an authority as fine in its way as Milton's—close to what Keats was attempting when, in painstaking revision of *Hyperion*, he turned from Milton to Dante. Always aware of what he is doing, Spenser calls it "sternenesse" of style: syntax becomes simpler, nearer to the metrical pattern, and the more sparing inversions and indirections have too much justification to seem *tours de force*. Meter and sentence beat almost in unison:

> *Ah! whither dost thou now thou greater Muse*
> *Me from these woods and pleasing forrests bring?*
> *And my fraile spirit (that doth oft refuse*
> *This too high flight, unfit for her weake wing)*
> *Lift up aloft, to tell of heavens King*
> *(Thy soveraine Sire) his fortunate successe,*
> *And victory, in bigger notes to sing,*
> *Which he obtain'd against that Titanesse,*
> *That him of heavens Empire sought to dispossesse.*
>
> *Yet sith I needs must follow thy behest,*
> *Do thou my weaker wit with skill inspire,*
> *Fit for this turne; and in my feeble brest*

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Kindle fresh sparks of that immortall fire,
Which learned minds inflameth with desire
Of heavenly things: for, who but thou alone,
That art yborne of heaven and heavenly Sire,
Can tell things doen in heaven so long ygone;
So farre past memory of man that may be knowne.

Spenser still flavors his style with the antique—*sith, yborne, ygone*—which are at the same time slight metrical helps; but he no longer needs easy aids, and there is no suspicion of quaintness in this slight, deliberate resort to archaism.

If in his last period he strikes out on the one hand in the direction of a sterner heroic style, on the other he carries his mastery of metrical complexity to heights unsurpassed in English. In *Prothalamion* the elaborate canzone is sustained by the structure of the sentence:

Calm was the day, and through the trembling ayre,
Sweete breathing Zephyrus did softly play
A gentle spirit, that lightly did delay
Hot Titans beames, which then did glyster fayre:
When I whom sullen care,
Through discontent of my long fruitlesse stay
In Princesse Court, and expectation vayne
Of idle hopes, which still doe fly away,
Like empty shaddows, did aflict my brayne,
Walkt forth to ease my payne
Along the shoare of silver streaming Themmes,
Whose rutty Bancke, the which his River hemmes,
Was paynted all with variable flowers,
And all the meades adornd with daintie gemmes,
Fit to decke maydens bowres,
And crowne their Paramours,
Against the Brydale day, which is not long:
Sweete Themmes runne softly, till I end my Song.

The skeletal statement may be transposed thus: *Calm was the bethrothal day when I walked forth to ease my pain along the Thames.* The elaboration is contrived by development of four

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

elements in the sentence: the calmness of the day, the personal pain, the easing of pain by the river's beauty, the coming ceremony. But these elements are not formally treated as in the *Amoretti.* Suspense is built up by what was to become Milton's favorite device—postponement of the main idea—though, grammatically speaking, Spenser begins with an inversion of the main clause. Calm, the mood of the whole poem, is first established in nature, then contrasted to a discordant personal mood with its equally discordant artificial background (the Court), then offered as a solace; but this seeming resolution is modified by the sudden introduction of the fourth element (harmonious with the day) in a coda. We have already seen in *Mother Hubberds Tale* that Spenser early learned the structural potentialities of relatives used often with deliberate looseness, and of careful placement of subordinate clauses. Now he no longer bothers to maintain exact balance between importance of substance and grammatical logic. This kind of intentional structural ambiguity is typical of the later Shakespeare.

In *Prothalamion* diction is for the most part simple, almost plain. *Mead* and *paramours* are the only obvious poeticisms, though we may include such words as *glyster, rutty, adorned, variable,* which were subsequently worked into a poetic diction and squandered. Description of nature is beautifully poised between artifice and reality; yet the pictorial is not only subordinated to emotional complexity, to the deliberate clash of moods; it is also of no more importance than the modulation of sound. Art is consummate here and appears less contrived than Tennyson's lyric beginning:

Calm is the morn without a sound,
Calm as to suit a calmer grief,
And only through the faded leaf
The chestnut pattering to the ground.

Spenser and Tennyson are frequently berated for describing rather than dramatizing emotion. Such direct statement as theirs seems to us often less truly *direct* than the half-articulate cry, the ellipsis, the psychologically revealing surprise. We prefer one kind of artifice to another.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

III

One manifestation of explicit as distinct from implicit use of language is preference for simile over metaphor. We cannot say that Spenser is a poet of simile, Shakespeare of metaphor; for neither confines himself to one exclusively. Their range is too wide, their use of language too rich and varied to distinguish more than general tendencies. A few examples will indicate the divergence.

My first choice is not fair, the poetic advantage being too conspicuously Shakespeare's; its value is similarity in the comparison. Spenser writes in *Januarie:*

> *You naked trees, whose shady leaves are lost,*
> *Wherein the byrds were wont to build their bowre:*
> *And now are clothd with mosse and hoary frost,*
> *Instede of blossmes, wherewith your buds did flowre:*
> *I see your teares, that from your boughes doe raine,*
> *Whose drops in drery isicles remaine.*
>
> *All so my lustfull leafe is drye and sere,*
> *My timely buds with wayling all are wasted:*
> *The blossome, which my braunch of youth did beare,*
> *With breathed sighes is blowne away, and blasted*
> *And from mine eyes the drizling teares descend,*
> *As on your boughes the isicles depend.*

Shakespeare may be partially indebted to this passage in his familiar *Sonnet LXXIII:*

> *That time of year thou mayst in me behold*
> *When yellow leaves, or none, or few do hang*
> *Upon those boughs which shake against the cold,*
> *Bare ruin'd choirs where late the sweet birds sang.*

He condenses into four lines as much as Spenser says in twelve—even more. His fourth line, ostensibly in simple apposition, actually carries much of the poetic meaning. He is using a form which demands compression, whereas Spenser's form allows him to set his own limit; but primarily Shakespeare achieves compression by metaphor and by exploiting fully the multiple mean-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ings of certain key words. *Bare* is made to work on several levels of meaning simultaneously:

1) My middle age is *bare*.
2) The boughs are *bare* of leaves.
3) The trees are *bare* of birds.
4) The choirs are *bare* of singers.

Thus the barrenness of middle age is made intensely visual and audible. Only the fourth meaning is directly stated; the rest are implicit, made valid by stressing one point of similarity in middle age, boughs in winter, deserted choirs—the last two literal (birds and singers with actual voices), the first metaphorical. In these lines Shakespeare exhausts the associations and correspondences in the figure; later he strips these away to its essence wher Macbeth complains:

my way of life
Is fall'n into the sear, the yellow leaf.

In each case, though metaphor is used, emotion is frankly stated; the statement becomes oblique through the deliberate multiplicity of implications. Incidentally, the adjective is paramount in Macbeth's condensation; *sear* especially, with its latent pun, carries most weight.

Spenser's comparison between a tree in winter and approaching age is explicit, elaborated in detail, like Richard's soliloquy on time. First we have the visualization of the naked trees, then the comparison—a method which strikes us as naive, even archaic, as lacking economy, since it involves repetition of all the elements compared, first stated in connection with trees, then recapitulated in terms of human aging. The second stanza contains the substance of the figure and is capable of standing alone; if we omit the simile bridge—"all so"—the first four lines of this stanza, already half metaphor, can as metaphor carry the central meaning in terms not dissimilar to Shakespeare's:

. . . my lustfull leafe is drye and sere,
My timely buds with wayling all are wasted:
The blossome, which my braunch of youth did beare,
With breathed sighes is blowne away, and blasted.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

This is youthful verse, written at a time when English poetry was in a bad way—gauche, verbose, almost inarticulate. The redundancy is in part a fault of inexperience; but when we make due allowance for this and check against his mature work, we are struck by two things: 1) to some extent Spenser seems to be pulled half-consciously into metaphor in the second stanza by the very nature of the language; 2) the recapitulation is certainly intentional. Perhaps it helps to point to the device in music. Spenser's repetition is not only with variation, it is with alteration of meaning. He is not trying to do what Shakespeare does; he is not interested in economy but in elaboration. His poem is an eclogue to winter rather than a sonnet using natural imagery to portray a mental and emotional state. The sense of loss portrayed in these two stanzas expresses a different relation between personal and objective. Shakespeare suborns nature to personal ends; Spenser simply puts man and nature in the same key. The metaphorical condensation which I made above actually destroys this balance. On any count Shakespeare's lines are superior to this studio work of Spenser's, but the fundamental difference is between two kinds of poetry.

The simile is not just a metaphor trailing its umbilical cord. Nor does it merely "add" and never develop. Often the epic simile attracts attention to itself rather than to the object which it is supposed to illuminate, but not always. The very elaboration in Spenser, whose effects are built up by accumulation, at times acquires a certain symbolism from the general context and a metaphorical dimension quite different from metaphorical framework. Though the end result is not unlike, the method differs from Shakespeare's.

Shakespeare by no means neglects the simile even in his mature plays, especially when he seeks a formal effect:

> Iago. *Patience, I say; your mind perhaps may change.*
> Othello. *Never, Iago. Like to the Pontic sea,*
> *Whose icy currents and compulsive course*
> *Ne'er feels retiring ebb, but keeps due on*
> *To the Propontic and the Hellespont,*

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Even so my bloody thoughts, with violent pace,
Shall ne'er look back, ne'er ebb to humble love,
Till that a capable and wide revenge
Swallow them up.

Othello's character is epic, his associations not with familiar English streams, but with exotic tides which literally defy nature's law. Shakespeare is not engaged in a psychological study of a Moor, yet he does contrive a specific way of thinking and feeling for Othello which goes beyond a sprinkling of exotic words; except in those psychologically realistic moments of the play when a broken phrase—little more than an ejaculation—becomes the shorthand of his torment, in all Othello's speeches there is a suggestion of the grandiloquent artifice used earlier for Richard Second and for some moments of Hotspur.

Spenser describes the ebb and flow of battle between Cambello and Triamond:

Like as the tide that comes from th'Ocean mayne,
Flowes up the Shenan with contrarie forse,
And overruling him in his owne rayne,
Drives backe the current of his kindly course,
And makes it seeme to have some other sourse:
But when the floud is spent, *then backe againe*
His borrowed *waters forst to* redisbourse,
He sends the sea his owne with double gaine,
And tribute *eke withall, as to his Sovereigne.*

Thus did the battell varie to and fro,
With diverse fortune doubtfull to be deemed

At first glance the last four lines of the simile seem elaboration beyond the point of comparison, for its own sake or to fill out the stanza. The tide is not subordinated to the fight so definitely as the Pontic tide to Othello's anger. Spenser's simile, indeed, almost halts the struggle, yet it presents the whole nature of that struggle better than his account of the action. And while it does not show the careful, logical expansion of detail of the simile in *Januarie*, it represents the same kind of sensibility, the same balance between man and nature. Later, in the second stanza

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

broken off above, Spenser introduces a secondary simile:

And all the while the disentrayled blood
Adowne their sides like litle rivers stremed,
That with the wasting of his vitall flood,
Sir Triamond at last full faint and feeble stood.

This is in perfect imaginative agreement with the "tribute" drawn back into the sea by the retreating tide. If we look again at the first stanza we can see what happens: "floud is *spent*" suggests to Spenser, in the midst of his simile's flight, a secondary meaning which he develops spontaneously without pausing. The waters of the sea are not really "spent," but "borrowed" to be "redisboursed" with "double gaine" in "tribute" owed the sea as "sovereign." The basic simile is still at work, only it has passed into the metaphorical dimension though still technically simile. Finally, some lines later the same simile with the same metaphorical meaning recurs as the particular wasting of one man's life through little rivers of blood is related to the elemental mystery of the sea's demands upon the land, and to the life-giving, death-bringing force of earth and water. The epic simile is not necessarily an ornamental excrescence in the *Faerie Queene*.

If Spenser seldom achieves the tension of Shakespeare's dramatic compression, he sets up a kind of vibration of interrelated meanings among various simple, direct statements. The centers of radiation in the broadest sense are usually the allegorical cores of the books; in a manner impossible to explain fully and to analyze, seemingly disconnected and widely separated passages acquire from the context of the poem an additional vitality. Occasionally even incidental passages isolated from the poem retain this cumulative energy.

Besides the almond-tree type, where simile flashes through metaphor,[5] or the expanded simile, like the Shannon tides which

[5] *Upon the top of all his loftie crest,*
A bunch of haires discolourd diversly,
With sprincled pearle, and gold full richly drest,
Did shake, and seem'd to daunce for jollity,
Like to an Almond tree ymounted hye
On top of greene Selinis all alone,
With blossomes brave bedecked daintily;
Whose tender locks *do tremble every one*
At every little breath, *that under heaven is blowne.*

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

develop inside themselves related metaphor, there is a further qualification to Spenser's preference for similes. His metaphors are less obtrusive. Often he casts a whole stanza in a metaphor so simple that it may pass unobserved, like this one—another river—with its rich overtones of irony:

> *God of the world and worldlings I me call,*
> *Great Mammon, greatest god below the skye,*
> That of my plenty poure out unto all,
> *And unto none my graces do envye:*
> *Riches, renowne, and principality,*
> *Honour, estate, and all this worldes good,*
> *For which men swincke and sweat incessantly,*
> From me do flow into an ample flood,
> *And* in the hollow earth *have their eternal brood.*

In the context of its underworld canto, this simple metaphor has a compression and complexity of its own. The river of materialism pours out its "graces" with ironical impartiality, breeding forms of life ("eternal brood") like the fertile Nile; only, along with Cocytus and Acheron and Styx, it is a river of hell.

IV

All things considered, we should take Mr. Herbert Read with a grain of reservation:

> Spenser in spite of his continual use of allegory, kept to the visual significance of words; each word distinct and separate, pebbles in the stream. But now [with Shakespeare] words were to flash with interverbal meanings; they no longer reflect an equivalent and logical meaning; they become mere sounds and symbols suggesting a meaning beyond the compass of words, clear only to the intuitive vision of the poet. Words dissolve and lose their outlines in such a fierce glory.

Spenser and Shakespeare cannot be completely separated in this way, not only because Shakespeare often uses language in the direct fashion of Spenser, but also because Spenser's allegory is not strictly continuous, and his words often have interverbal meanings acquired in a different way from Shakespeare's. But

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Mr. Read rightly grants to Shakespeare rather than Spenser the final consummation of all the potentialities of English, which, as Mr. Empson says, is "full of metaphors which are not dead but sleeping, and, while making a direct statement, colour it with an implied comparison." This essential difference between English and French explains why symbolism, a new and exciting poetic development in France in the nineteenth century, characterizes English poetry almost from the beginning and without conscious effort.

As has already been apparent, the two ways of using language, explicit and implicit, direct and oblique, are reflected not only in the proportion of simile to metaphor, but also in the nature of the imagery involved. What Mr. Read calls Spenser's "visual use of words" is to some extent borne out by his predominantly visual imagery. Mr. Read ignores and I have slighted Spenser's auditory imagery and his unfailing sense of the sound value of words.[6] Not even Milton and Tennyson surpass Spenser in delicacy of ear. Indeed, the "interverbal flashes," which Mr. Read attributes to Shakespeare and denies to Spenser, appear more often in Spenser than he realizes; they are merely of a different order, and are inevitable in a poet so attuned to the sound of words. In Shakespeare such sound relations are most characteristically manifested in highly imaginative puns; in Spenser most often as internal rhymes, but also, in a different kind of wit:

Breeder of new, renewer of old smarts.

---

[6]Sensitivity to sound values is so instinctive in Spenser that some of his effects which we have been taught to explain as alliteration, assonance, internal rhyme, rather develop meaning through sound relationships, just as in the process of creation imagery at the start seems to beget subsequent images and in part control the development of the poem. For example:

Sleepe after toyle, port after stormie seas,
Ease, *after warre, death after life does greatly* please.

And in *Richard II*, the Shakespearean play nearest to Spenser as well as to Marlowe, we find not only similar structural balance, but also this special sound relationship, which cannot be satisfactorily explained either by "internal rhyme" or "pun":

But whate'er I be,
Nor I nor any man that but man is
With nothing shall be pleased, *till he be* eased
With being nothing.

Here the rhyme really represents a common element of meaning in the two words. Shakespeare makes Spenser's simple statement (ease does please) sharper and more causal (nothing doth please till ease); the intellectual, soon to precipitate metaphysical wit, enters.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Here sound pattern is important—especially *r* in shifting positions and in combination with various vowel shadings (most obviously, B*reede*r—*re*newe*r*), but sound is used not just for itself; without being puns, the words establish complex interrelationships of meaning.

Spenser's visual imagery often shows sensitivity to touch, to texture, as remarkable as Shakespeare's—that enmeshing of sensuous imagery considered almost the special province of Keats. And interverbal meanings flash through the almond-tree stanza (where the images are hardly separate "pebbles in a stream") like a fuse to powder. The images are partly self-begotten.

Mr. Eliot provides a significant contrast between Dante's and Shakespeare's visual imagery. Dante speaks of the crowd in Hell peering at him and Virgil in the dim light:

> and sharpened their vision (knitted their brows) at us, like an old tailor peering at the eye of his needle.

> The purpose of this type of simile is solely to make us see *more definitely* the scene which Dante has put before us in the preceding lines.
>
> *she looks like sleep,*
> *As she would catch another Antony*
> *In her strong toil of grace.*
>
> The image of Shakespeare's is much more complicated than Dante's, and more complicated than it looks. It has the grammatical form of a kind of simile (the 'as if' form), but of course 'catch in her toil' is a metaphor. But whereas the simile of Dante is merely to make you see more clearly how the people looked, and is explanatory, the figure of Shakespeare is expansive rather than intensive; its purpose is to *add* to what you see (either on the stage or in your imagination) a reminder of that fascination of Cleopatra which shaped her history and that of the world, and of that fascination being so strong that it prevails even in death. It is more elusive.

This distinction between two types of imagery, involving two ways of using language, is clear-cut. Expansive imagery, like Mr. Read's "interverbal meanings," is characteristic of Shakespeare, but not exclusively. When he speaks of Coriolanus wiping his bloody brow and going forth to fight again,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Like to a harvestman that's task'd to mow
Or all or lose his hire,

he is concerned with more than visualization, yet he is closer to the intensive quality of Dante's simile; he is closer still when Volumnia protests of her son,

yet here he lets me prate
Like one in the stocks.

After this direct simile, however, Shakespeare immediately slips into metaphor as she continues:

Thou hast never in thy life
Show'd thy dear mother any courtesy,
When she, poor hen, fond of no second brood,
Has clucked thee to the wars.

With the metaphor a certain expansiveness enters; there is a slight loss in clarity and gain in suggestion, which is true also of Spenser's almond-tree simile, expanding through intermittent metaphor. Both Volumnia images are auditory as well as visual. It is important to realize that Shakespeare on occasion is capable of directness, though he rarely loses, or wishes to lose, the associative potentialities of English words. His whole method in *Coriolanus* differs from that in *Antony and Cleopatra;* the greater simplicity and directness of language, as well as its classic construction, explain why it has been more readily translated into French.

Shakespeare's imagery of this type is by no means limited to *Coriolanus,* but is found throughout his plays, depending on the effect which he seeks. Spenser is closer to Dante in that he, too, inclines to the "explanatory"; yet in his mature poetry he rarely develops a simile of any length without sliding in and out of metaphor enroute. And Spenser, whose allegory is seldom the logically coherent allegory of Dante, strikes out expansive imagery on occasion, one feels, simply by allowing his imagination free rein and by surrendering to the metaphorical nature of his language; I say "surrendering" because Spenser seldom seems deliberately to exploit this quality of English like Shakespeare. Even Shakespeare's homeliest imagery is often kindled by the prodigal magic of Elizabethan English into Mr. Read's "fierce glory,"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

which Dante reserves for the most intense spiritual vision. Antony's death reveals to Cleopatra that she is

No more, but e'en a woman, and commanded
By such poor passion as the maid that milks
And does the meanest chares.

Visualization here is only incidental; the comparison is complicated by intellectual as well as imaginative suggestion. Instead of reducing Cleopatra momentarily to the milk-maid, Shakespeare, whether consciously or not, elevates the milk-maid to golden pastoral.

A less difficult example is to be found in *Twelfth Night.*

O, fellow, come, the song we had last night.
Mark it, Cesario, it is old and plain;
The spinsters and the knitters in the sun
And the free maids that weave their thread with bones
Do use to chant it.

"Old and plain" this image may claim to be but is not; it "seeks to add rather than explain." All sorts of interverbal meanings come into play, glorifying what may have been a homely memory from Stratford days into something almost as portentous, though entirely without consequence, as the Fates weaving. There is no need to analyze too closely (it defies analysis) the source of the aura: *chant* is the most obvious, most intentionally vibrating word; *bones* used here specifically of *knitting needles* (Dante would have said precisely *bone needles*) suggests inevitably vague, wider connotations; and *knitters in the sun* conveys both more and less than Dante, who would have given a clear, uncomplicated visualization. By this sea-change, so frequent in Shakespeare, the homeliest things are transmuted like kitchen utensils under the brush of Vermeer. Even when closest to the direct method, he gives us something altogether different from Dante; his images are seldom completely objectified, coming to their full richness only in the mind.

King Lear provides an image even more remarkable in contrast to Dante's tailor than Mr. Eliot's choice, for it is also concerned with threading a needle and shows the extreme compression which Shakespeare achieves at his height:

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Cornwall: *You know not why we came to visit you—*
Regan: *Thus out of season,* threading dark-eyed night.

In Dante we have really two separate images compared by the simile: the concentrated stare of the throng and the frowning concentration of a tailor threading a needle in dim light. In Shakespeare there are several images superimposed: 1) threading a needle; 2) journeying through the night; 3) the dark eye of the needle; 4) the darkness of the night. By thus coalescing (and abstracting) images Shakespeare secures extraordinary complexity of suggestion. The needle, which is definitely there and mentioned by name in Dante is not mentioned at all by Shakespeare. It is implicit, suggested by two things connected with it—*threading* and *eye*. Unlike the bones in *Twelfth Night,* this does not cause ambiguity. He wants only these two qualities; omission of the word *needle* is economical; more important, it is essential. The multiple applications of *threading* and *eye* would be impossible without the omission, for the overlapping similarities here are not susceptible to the analytical expansion of Richard Second's elaborate conceit on time, tears, sighs, groans. This compression means loss of clarity; but the omission indicates how Shakespeare takes the needle from the objective plane and makes it subjective, an important element, but merely in one of its aspects, of his image. This coalescing is of a different order from Spenser's coalescing in the almond-tree stanza; it is one reason why Shakespeare rather than Spenser develops or exhausts the full potentialities of the language.

Shakespeare's interverbal meanings have been too well explored in recent criticism to detain us further. But we may profitably pause a moment over a danger which Mr. Read, without himself falling into, suggests when he remarks that with Shakespeare words "no longer reflect an equivalent and logical meaning; they become mere sounds and symbols suggesting a meaning beyond the compass of words." Mr. I. A. Richards' ingenious demonstration in his "sound" version of Milton's *Nativity Hymn* has not entirely scotched the tendency to regard words in poetry as mere sound and symbol. Poets have many devices for making words say

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

more than they logically mean; but complete abolition of meaning is not one of them.

Sidney, turning the very limitation of words to advantage, voices the constant feeling of the sonneteers:

What may words say, or what may words not say
Where truth itself must speak like flattery?

Simple hyperbole becomes an Elizabethan trademark; Spenser and the rest bankrupt vocabulary in praise of Eliza. Drayton in one of his sonnets strikes off one hyperbole which Shakespeare himself could not better:

And queens hereafter shall be glad to live
Upon the alms of thy superfluous praise.

And Shakespeare's

Who's born that day
When I forget to send to Antony
Shall die a beggar,

is, in the words of Dr. Johnson, logically absurd, yet poetically true. In these instances the defiance of logic, however, is open and calculated. The Elizabethans would be the last poets to throw meaning overboard; without the norm the distortions are impossible; and even when breaking its rules they rely more than we suspect on the logic of grammar to articulate the illogic of poetic truth.

We have already noticed how much the structure of Spenser's verse depends on the placement of relative clauses and appositional phrases. Though predominantly direct in his statement and usually crystal clear, in complex passages in *Prothalamion,* even so early as *Mother Hubberds Tale,* his sentences are often indirect. By relying on the logic of the sentence he saves a repetition (*smarts*):

Breeder of new, renewer of old smarts,

a technique carried to its ultimate by Pope:

Alive, ridiculous, and dead, forgot.

In Shakespeare's syntax relative and appositional clauses show even greater economy, and ellipsis becomes almost the rule:

You know not why we came to visit you—
Thus out of season, threading dark-eyed night.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

This essentially very simple statement is complicated only by an adverbial phrase and one in apposition; but the appositional phrase is so loose that only its logical relation to the rest of the sentence saves it from enigma. Instead of using the maximum of logic like Pope, Shakespeare uses the minimum; still that minimum makes all the difference between meaning and no meaning, for the illogical content of poetry must have logical structure.

When Housman remarks that

> even Shakespeare, who had so much to say, would sometimes pour out his loveliest poetry in saying nothing . . .
>
> *Take, O take those lips away,*
> *That so sweetly were forsworn;*
> *And those eyes, the break of day,*
> *Lights that do mislead the morn!*
> *But my kisses bring again,*
> *Seals of love, but seal'd in vain.*
>
> That is nonsense, but it is ravishing poetry.

what does *he* mean?

He is right if he means what Johnson meant—content only. But one suspects that he did not realize "break of day" and "lights that do mislead the morn" are metaphors in simple apposition to "eyes." Only the *metaphor* is not logical. The song makes perfectly good poetic sense divorced from its context in *Measure for Measure;* restored, it makes even more. And that rarer song from *The Tempest,* "Full fathom five," though scarcely scientific in substance, depends for its effect on logical statement. I cheerfully agree that such songs as these bring critical analysis up short with the jerk of its tether; but syntax is always there, no matter how much elided or contorted, and with syntax is always the meaning of words, never diminished to vanishing or with it would vanish the medium of poetry.

V

Spenser never sings in this way; his lyrics, when they are not dramatic like *Epithalamion,* are more formal and intricate, shedding their benison on Jonson, who in an unfilial moment, and

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

thinking perhaps primarily of the *Shepheardes Calender,* complained that Spenser "writ no language." Jonson brings to song the artful felicity and clarity of Spenser used in a new way worth the attention of a generation like ours, whose poetic diction is frayed. Another neglected "son" of Spenser who has relevance to us today is Samuel Daniel, whose contemporaries thought him prosaic but "well-languaged"—a considerable tribute. Coleridge calls Daniel's "that style which, as the neutral ground of prose and verse, is common to both," anticipating Mr. Eliot's fine remarks on Johnson. Above all, no poet can fail to profit by a study of Spenser's prosody in all its range.

Poetry should reclaim her lost provinces.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Two Poems

ANTHONY HECHT

SONGS FOR THE AIR,
OR
SEVERAL ATTITUDES ABOUT BREATHING

I

We may consider every cloud a lake
Transmogrified, its character unselfed,
At once a whale and a white wedding cake
Bellowed into conspicuous ectoplasm.
It is a lake's ghost that goes voyaging.
And therefore it is fitting we should sing
Of its mild spacious grave, where this phantasm
Glitters like the white porcelain of Delft.

We who shall be so damply put away,
Receiving vigor through dark capillaries,
Must marvel how the delicate decay
Of water makes so elegant a shape.
Air is its earth. This air on which we dine
Bothers the dead lake's body to refine
Its fluidness, and with suggestion merries
The jovial ghost to mimic and to ape.

Faustus, worrying thistle-tube and flask,
Dreams of profound Pythagorean changes
That shall contrive for him a living mask.
He does not figure blood thicker than water.
Though a departed pond may promenade
As unicorn or leopard, masquerade
Suits not our tissue, which is rife with manges:
Spittle and mud thicken the human mortar.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

II

Lighter than air, Professor Picard glides
Steadily upward to the stratosphere.
In that unpeopled realm he has no peer.
We have only the thought of him. He strides
The baby-blue continuum, and guides
For the still quarters of his spare retreat.
His feet point down at us like angels' feet.
It is the pure, the matterless abides.

Amid these heavier gasses, breath of plants,
Sweat of the sea, belches and coughs and farts,
We bade him Godspeed to the permanent,
Knowing the enterprise for a romance;
Something substantial in our soggy hearts
Anticipated sadly his descent.

III

In the dark belly of a viol, air
Revolved, swirled like a frightened school of perch
Caught in the clever weave of closing nets,
Or, like the spiral steps of minarets,
Whirled round a single dowel of sound, in search
Of the Pure Essence, which is named in prayer.

Pinwheels and Ferris wheels of air revolved
To full orchestral pomp, air writhed like blood
In the eccentric bodies of French horns;
Even thus a comic majesty adorns
The Shade of Brandenburg, who rode or stood
On a huge carousel, till it dissolved.

Or spinning like a Sperry gyroscope,
The air balanced itself on one lean leg,
And, motionless in motion, it bespoke

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The poise of an unquestionable Duke,
Till the conductor, brandishing his wig,
Stopped all the air as finally as rope.

IV

Let us set in sounding phrase
Words of honor and of praise
For the air that covers all
Imperfections, which the tall
Can walk under with no dread
That he's going to bruise his head

On its ceiling, which the weak
Can encompass if he speak
Bravely with it like a man,
Which the old and ugly can
Be embraced by and caressed,
By which naked things are dressed.
Let us set in sounding phrase
Words of honor and of praise
For the air that covers all.

THE PLACE OF PAIN IN THE UNIVERSE

Mixture of chloroform and oil of cloves
Swabbed with a wadded toothpick on the gums
Grants us its peace by slackening the thread
Of rich embroidered nerve spun in the head,
And to the weak and wretched jaw it comes
Lighter than manna and in sweeter loaves.

An old engraving pictures St. Jerome
Studying at his table, where a skull,
Crowned with a candle, streams cold tears of wax
On its bone features for the flesh it lacks,
Yet its white complement of teeth is full
While all its pain runs happily to loam.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Observe there is no easy moral here.
Having received their diet from the skies,
The teeth remain, although they cannot bite,
And to perform inspection beyond sight
The empty sockets famish for their eyes.
The pain is life-like in that waxwork tear.

New Forest

ELEANOR HESTHAL

Not leaning, not breaking, the forests stand
Bark-naked, worn by winter
To the bareness of beach
Before foam curls over.

Beginning green touches the season
With spring-bordering budlings.
The feathered sky flickers gusts of cloud
And the slow gods return,

Enwind their pale ancestry
With cataracts, and invoke
Fountain spirits in all the brooks.

The perverse snake sucks gallberries.
Illusions funnel space like smoke.
But still the cleanly year abides,
Holding reality by ginger root,
And root of oak,
And bole of fern.

And by the leaf's new finger
Testing the freshness of air.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The NRACP

GEORGE P. ELLIOTT

(The NRACP is the National Relocation Authority: Colored Persons. The CPR is the Colored Persons Reserve. PR is Public Relations.)

March 3

DEAR HERB,

Your first letter meant more to me than I can say, but the one I received yesterday has at last aroused me from my depression. I will try to answer both of them at once. You sensed my state of mind; I could tell it from little phrases in your letter—"open your heart, though it be only to a sunset," "try reading *Finnegans Wake;* if you ever get *into* it you won't be able to fight your way out again for months." I cherish your drolleries. They are little oases of half-light and quiet in this rasping, blinding landscape.

How I hate it! Nothing but the salary keeps me here. Nothing. I have been driven into myself in a very unhealthy way. Long hours, communal eating, the choice between a badly lighted reading room full of people and my own cell with one cot and two chairs and a table, a swim in a chlorinated pool, walks in this violent, seasonless, arid land—what is there? There seem to be only two varieties of people here: those who "have culture," and talk about the latest *New Yorker* cartoons, listen to imitation folksongs and subscribe to one of the less popular book clubs; and those who play poker, talk sports and sex, and drink too much. I prefer the latter type as people, but unfortunately I do not enjoy their activities, except drinking; and since I know the language and mores of the former type, and have more inclination toward them, I am thrown with people whom I dislike intensely. In this

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

muddle I find myself wishing, selfishly, that you were here; your companionship would mean so much to me now. But you knew better than I what the CPR would mean—you were most wise to stay in Washington, most wise. You will be missing something by staying there—but I assure you it is something well worth missing.

I must mention the two universal topics of conversation. From the filing clerks to my division chief I know of no one, including myself, who does not talk absorbedly about mystery stories. A few watered-down eclectics say they haven't much preference in mysteries, but the folksongers to a man prefer the tony, phoney Dorothy Sayers-S. S. Van Dine type of pseudo-literary snobbish product, and the horsey folk prefer the Dashiell Hammett romantic cum violent realism; there is one fellow—a big-domed Irishman named O'Doone who wears those heavy-rimmed, owlish glasses that were so popular some years ago—who does nothing but read and reread Sherlock Holmes, and he has won everyone's respect, in some strange way, by this quaint loyalty. He's quite shy, in a talkative, brittle way, but I think I could grow fond of him.—Yet everyone finds a strong need to read the damnable things, so strong that we prefer the absolute nausea of reading three in one day—I did it once myself, for three days on end—to not reading any. What is it actually that we prefer not to do? I can only think of Auden's lines, "The situation of our time Surrounds us like a baffling crime." Of our time, and of this job.

What are we doing here?—that is the other subject none of us can let alone. We are paid fantastic salaries—the secretary whom I share with another writer gets $325 a month, tell Mary *that* one—and for one whole month we have done nothing while on the job except to read all the provisions and addenda to the Relocation Act as interpreted by the Authority, or to browse at will in the large library of literature by and about Negroes, from sociological studies to newspaper poetry in dialect. You will know the Act generally of course; but I hope you are never for any

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

reason subjected to this Ph.D-candidate torture of reading to exhaustion about a subject in which you have only a general interest. But the *why* of this strange and expensive indoctrination, is totally beyond me. I thought that I was going to do much the same sort of PR work here on the spot as we had been doing in the State Department; I thought the salary differential was just a compensation for living in this hell-hole. That's what everyone here had thought too. It appears, however, that there is something more important brewing. In the whole month I have been here—I swear it—I have turned out only a couple of articles describing the physical charms of this desiccated cesspool; they appeared in Negro publications which I hope you have not even heard of. And beyond that I have done nothing but bore myself to death by reading Negro novels and poetry.

They are a different tribe altogether; their primeval culture is wonderful enough to merit study—I would be the last to deny it. But not by me. I have enough trouble trying to understand the rudiments of my own culture without having this one pushed off onto me.

—I have been stifled and confused for so long that all my pent-up emotions have found their worthiest outlet in this letter to you, my dear friend. I have been vowing (as we used to vow to quit smoking, remember?) to stop reading mysteries but my vows seldom survive the day. Now I do solemnly swear and proclaim that each time I have the urge to read a mystery, I will instead write a letter to you. If these epistles become dull and repetitious, just throw them away without reading them. I'll put a mark—say an M—on the envelope of these counter-mystery letters, so you needn't even open them if you wish. I'm sure there will be a lot of them.

Does this sound silly? I suppose it does. But I am in a strange state of mind. There's too much sunlight and the countryside frightens me and I don't understand anything.

Bless you,

ANDY

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

March 14

Dear Herb,

It wasn't as bad as I had feared, being without mysteries. We get up at seven and go to work at eight. Between five and six in the afternoon, there's time for a couple of highballs. From seven or so, when dinner is over, till ten or eleven—that's the time to watch out for. After you have seen the movie of the week and read *Time* and the *New Yorker,* then you discover yourself, with that autonomic gesture with which one reaches for a cigarette, wandering toward the mystery shelf and trying to choose between Carter Dickson and John Dickson Carr (two names for the same writer, as I hope you don't know). On Sundays there's tennis in the early morning and bowling in the afternoon. But then those gaping rents in each tightly woven, just tolerable day remain, no matter what you do. At first I thought I should have to tell myself bedtime stories. One evening I got half-drunk in the club-rooms and absolutely potted alone in my own room afterwards. First time in my life. Another time, O'Doone and I sat up till midnight composing an "Epitaph for a Mongoose." I can't tell you how dreary some of our endeavors were; O'Doone still quotes one of mine occasionally. He's a strange fellow, I can't exactly figure him out but I like him in an oblique sort of way. We neither one fit into any of three or four possible schemes of things here and we share a good deal in general outlook. But he can amuse himself with a cerebral horseplay which only makes me uneasy. O'Doone has a French book—God knows where he got it—on Senegalese dialects so he goes around slapping stuffy people on the back and mumbling "Your grandmother on your father's side was a pig-faced gorilla" or else a phrase which in Senegalese has something to do with transplanting date trees but which in English sounds obscene, and then he laughs uproariously. In any event, he's better off than I, who am amused by almost nothing.

Now that you have been spared the threatened dejection of my counter-mystery letters, I must confess to the secret vice which I have taken up in the past week. It grows upon me

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

too, it promises to become a habit which only age and infirmity will break. I had thought it a vice of middle age (and perhaps it is—are we not 38, Herb? When does middle age commence?). I *take walks*. I take long walks alone. If I cannot say that I enjoy them exactly, yet I look forward to them with that eagerness with which an adolescent will sometimes go to bed in order to continue the dream which waking has interrupted.

Not that my walks are in any way dreamlike. They are perfectly real. But they take place in a context so different from any of the social or intellectual contexts of the CPR day, and they afford such a strong emotional relief to it, that I think these walks may be justly compared to a continued dream. My walks, however, have a worth of their own such as dreams can never have, for instead of taking me from an ugly world to a realm of unexplained symbols, they have driven me toward two realities, about which I must confess I have had a certain ignorance: myself, and the natural world. And standing, as I feel I do, at the starting-point of high adventure, I feel the explorer's excitement, and awe, and no self-pity at all.

I have recaptured—and I am not embarrassed to say it—the childhood delight in stars. That's a great thing to happen to a man, Herb—to be able to leave the smoke- and spite-laden atmosphere of bureaucracy, walk a few miles out into the huge, silent desert, and look at the stars with a delight whose purity needs no apology and whose expansiveness need find no words for description. I am astonished by the sight of a Joshua tree against the light blue twilight sky, I am entranced by the vicious innocence of one of the kinds of cactus that abound hereabouts, I enjoy these garish sunsets with a fervor that I once considered indecent. I cannot say I like this desert—certainly not enough to live in it permanently—but it has affected me, very deeply. I think that much of my trouble during my first month here was resisting the force of the desert. Now, I no longer resist it, yet I have not submitted to it; rather I have developed a largeness of spirit, a feeling of calm and magnificence. Which I am sure is in part lightheadedness at having such a weight of nasty care

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

removed all at once, but which is wonderful while it lasts.

But it's not *just* lightheadedness. Some obstruction of spirit, an obstruction of whose existence I was not even aware, has been removed within me, so that now I can and dare observe the complexities of that catalogued, indifferent, unaccountable natural world which I had always shrugged at. One saw it from train windows, one dealt with it on picnics; one admired the nasturtiums and peonies of one's more domesticated friends, one approved of lawns and shade trees. What then? What did one know of the rigidity of nature's order or of the prodigality with which she wastes and destroys and errs? I came here furnished only with the ordinary generic names of things—snake, lizard, toad, rabbit, bug, cactus, sage-brush, flower, weed—but already I have watched a road-runner kill a rattlesnake, and I am proud that I know how rabbits drink. Do you know how rabbits drink? If you ask what difference it makes to know this, I can happily reply, "None at all, but it gives me pleasure." A pleasure which does not attempt to deny mortality, but accepts it and doesn't care—that is a true pleasure, and one worth cherishing.

11 *p. m.*

I owe it to you, I know, to give a somewhat less personal, less inward account of this place. But a calculated, itemized description of anything, much less of so monstrous a thing as a desert, that is beyond me. Instead I'll try to give you an idea of what effect such physical bigness can have upon one.

Our buildings are situated at the head of a very long valley—the Tehuala River Valley—which is partially arable and which, in both the upper and lower regions, is good for grazing purposes. The highway into the valley, that is, the highway that leads to the East, as well as the railroad, runs not far from our settlement. Being Public Relations, we are located just within the fence (it is a huge, barbarous fence with guards). We have had a rather surprising number of visitors already, and hundreds more are expected during the summer. Our eight buildings are flat-roofed, gray, of a horizontal design, and air-conditioned. But our

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

view of the valley is cut off by a sharp bend about four or five miles below us. The tourists, in other words, can see almost nothing of the valley, and just as little of the Reserve stretching for 800 miles to the southwest, for this is the only public entrance to the Reserve, and no airplanes are permitted over any part of it. Around the turn in the upper valley, is yet another even more barbarous, even better guarded fence, past which no one goes except certain Congressmen, the top officials (four, I believe) in the NRACP, and SSE (Special Service Employees, who, once they have gone past that gate, do not return and do not communicate with the outside world even by letter). All this secrecy —you can fill in details to suit yourself—is probably unnecessary, but it does succeed in arousing an acute sense of mystery and speculation about the Reserve. Well, being no more than human I walked the five miles to the bend, climbed a considerable hill nearby, and looked out over the main sweep of the valley for the the first time. I was hot and tired when I reached the foot of the hill, so I sat down—it was around 5:30—and ate the lunch I had brought. When I reached the top of the hill the sun was about to set; the long shadows of the western hills lay over the floor of the valley and in some places they extended halfway up the hills to the east. Far, far to the west, just to the north of the setting sun, was a snow-capped mountain; and immediately in front of me, that is, a mile and a half or so away, stretched the longest building I have ever seen in my life. It had a shed roof rising away from me; there were no windows on my side of the building; nothing whatsoever broke the line of its continuous gray back; and it was at least a mile long, probably longer. Beyond it, lay dozens of buildings exactly like this one except for their length; some of them ran, as the long one did, east and west, some ran north and south, some aslant. I could not estimate to my satisfaction how large most of them were; they seemed to be roughly about the size of small factories. The effect which their planner had deliberately calculated and achieved was that of a rigidly patterned, unsymmetrical (useless?) articulation of a restricted flat area. Nothing broke the effect, and for a reason which I cannot

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

define, these buildings in the foreground gave a focus and order to the widening scene that lay before me such that I stood for the better part of an hour experiencing a pure joy—a joy only heightened by my grateful knowledge that these Intake buildings were designed to introduce an entire people to the new and better world beyond (and I must confess I felt the better that I myself was, albeit humbly, connected with the project). The fine farms and ranches and industries and communities which would arise from these undeveloped regions took shape in the twilight scene before me, shimmering in the heat waves rising from the earth. But presently it was quite dark—the twilights are very brief here—and I was awakened from my reverie by the lights going on in one of the buildings before me. I returned to the PR settlement, and to my solitary room, in a state of exaltation which has not yet deserted me.

For an hour, the Universe and History co-extended before me; and they did not exclude me; for while I am but a grain on the shore of event, yet only within my consciousness did this co-extending take place and have any meaning. For that long moment, mine was the power.

I will write again soon.

ANDY

March 20

Dear Herb,

You complain that I didn't say anything directly about my voyage of discovery into myself, as I had promised in my last letter. And that the internal high pressures of urban life are blowing me up like a balloon in this rarefied atmosphere.

Maybe so. I'll try to explain what has been going on. But I forgot to take a cartographer on my voyage, so that my account may resemble, in crudeness, that of an Elizabethan freebooter in Caribbean waters. (If I had the energy, I'd try to synthesize these balloon-voyage metaphors; but I haven't.)

It all began when I asked myself, on one of my walks, why I was here, why I had taken this job, $8,000 a year—yes. The social

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

importance of the project—maybe (but not my personal importance to the project). Excitement at being in on the beginning of a great experiment in planning—yes. The hope of escaping from the pressures of Washington life—yes. These are valid reasons all of them, but in the other balance—why I should want *not* to come here—are better reasons altogether. An utter absence of urban life. No friends. No chance of seeing Betty. The loss of permanent position (this one you pointed out most forcefully) in State for a better paid but temporary job here. Loss of friends. Too inadequate a knowledge of my duties, or of the whole NRACP for that matter, to permit me to have made a decision wisely. And an overpowering hatred of restrictions (never once, Herb, for three years to be allowed to leave this Reserve! I've been sweating here for seven weeks, but that is 156 weeks. Christ!). Now I had known, more or less, all these factors before I came here, all these nice rational, statistical factors. But when I asked myself the other night, in the false clarity of the desert moonlight, why I had chosen to come, why really, I still could not answer myself satisfactorily. For of one thing I was still certain, that none of the logical reasons, none of my recognized impulses, would have brought me here singly or combined.

I also, being in the mood, asked myself why I had continued to live with Clarice for five years after I had known quite consciously that I did not love her but felt a positive contempt for her. Betty accounted for part of it, and the usual fear of casting out again on one's own. But I would not have been on my own in any obvious sense: I am sure you know of my love affairs during those five years; I could have married any of three or four worthy women. And I ask myself why it was that the moment Clarice decided once and for all to divorce me—she did the deciding, not me; I don't think you knew that—from that time on I lost my taste for my current inamorata and have not had a real affair since. These questions I was unable to answer; but at least I was seriously asking them of myself. I was willing and able to face the answers.

The key to the answer came from my long-limbed, mildly

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

pretty, efficient, but (I had originally thought) frivolous and banal secretary—Ruth. She is one of those women who, because they do not have an "intellectual" idea in their noodles, are too frequently dismissed as conveniently decorative but not very valuable. And perhaps Ruth really is that. But she has made two or three remarks recently which seem to me to display an intuitive intelligence of a considerable order. Yet they may be merely aptly chosen, conventional observations. It is hard to tell.—She interests me. She has a maxim which I resent but cannot refute: "There are those who get it and those who dish it out; I intend to be on the side of the dishers." (Is this the post-Christian golden rule? It has its own power, you know.) In any case, the other day I was sitting in my cubicle of an office, in front of which Ruth's desk is placed—she services two of us. I had my feet up on the desk in a rather indecorous fashion, and I had laid the book I was reading on my lap while I smoked a cigarette. I suppose I was daydreaming a little. Suddenly Ruth opened the door and entered. I started, picked up the book and took my feet off the table-top. Ruth cocked an eye at me and said, "You like to feel guilty, don't you? All I wanted to know was whether you could spare time for a cup of coffee." So we went to the café and had coffee, and didn't even mention her statement or its cause.

But it set me thinking; and the longer I thought about it, the better I liked it. I had always discounted wild, Dostoyevskian notions like that as being too perverse to be true. But now I am not at all sure that frivolous, red-nailed Ruth wasn't right. So long as Clarice had been there to reprove me for my infidelities, I had had them. When her censorship was removed, the infidelities, or any love affairs at all, lost their spice—the spice which was the guilt that she made me feel about them. And then, having divorced Clarice, I took this job. This job is a sop to my sense of guilt at being white and middle-class, that is to say, one of Ruth's "dishers," a sop because I am participating in an enterprise whose purpose is social justice; at the same time it is a punishment, because of the deprivations I am undergoing; yet the actual luxury of my life and my actual status in the bureaucracy, high but not

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

orthodox, privileged yet not normally restricted, nourishes the guilt which supports it. What it is that causes the sense of guilt in the first place, I suppose Freud could tell me, but I am not going to bother to find out. There are certain indecencies about which one ought not to inquire unless one has to. Social guilt—that is to say, a sense of responsibility toward society—is a good thing to have, and I intend to exploit it in myself. I intend to satisfy it by doing as fine a job as I possibly can; and furthermore I intend to find a worthy European family, say Italian, who are impoverished, and to support them out of my salary. I must confess that the CARE packages we used to send to Europe after the war made me feel better than all the fine sentiments I ever gave words to.

I am grateful that I came here. I have been thrown back upon myself in a way that has only benefited me.

We begin work soon. The first trainload of Negroes arrived today, 500 of them. They are going through Intake (the buildings I described in my last letter) and our work, we are told, will commence within a few days. Exactly what we are to do, we will be told tomorrow. I look forward to it eagerly.

ANDY

I read this letter over before putting it in the envelope. That was a mistake. All the excitement about myself which I had felt so keenly sounds rather flat as I have put it. There must be a great deal for me yet to discover. As you know, I have never spent much of my energy in intimacies, either with myself or with other people. One gets a facsimile of it when talking about the universal stereotypes of love with a woman. But this desert has thrown me back upon myself; and from your letter I take it you would find my explorations of interest. However, you must not expect many more letters in so tiresome a vein. I will seal and mail this one tonight lest I repent in the morning.

April 10

Dear Herb,

I have not known how to write this letter, though I've tried

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

two or three times in the past week to do it. I'm going to put it in the form of a homily, with illustrations, on the text "There are those who get it and those who dish it out; I intend to be on the side of the dishers."

First, in what context did it occur? It is the motto of a charming young woman (any doubts I may have expressed about her are withdrawn as of now: she is all one could ask for) who is not malicious and does not in the least want to impose her beliefs or herself upon other people. She sends $100 a month to her mother, who is dying of cancer in a county hospital in Pennsylvania. When she told me she was sending the money, I asked her why. "Why?" said Ruth. "I'm disappointed in you to ask me such a thing." "All right, be disappointed, but tell me why." She shrugged a little in a humorous way. "She's my mother. And anyway," she added, "we're all dying, aren't we?" The important thing to note about Ruth is—she means it but she doesn't care. Just as she doesn't really care whether you like her clothes or her lovely hair; she does, and you ought to; the loss is yours if you don't. She was reared in a perfectly usual American city, and she has chosen from its unconscious culture the best in custom and attitude.

But she said it here, in the Public Relations division of the Colored Persons Reserve, here where there is as much getting and dishing out as anywhere in the world, where the most important Negro in the Reserve, the President of it, may be in a very real sense considered inferior to our window-washer. The first time O'Doone heard her say it—he had dropped by to talk a while, and Ruth had joined us—he made the sign of the cross in the air between himself and Ruth and backed clear out of the room. He didn't return either. I'm sure he's not religious. I don't know why he did that.

Now what does the statement imply? Primarily, it makes no judgment and does not urge to action. It is unmoral. "There is a condition such that some people must inflict pain and others must receive it; since it is impossible to be neutral in this regard and since I like neither to give nor to take injury, I shall choose the

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

path of least resistance—ally myself with the inflictors, not because I like their side and certainly not because I dislike the other side, but only because I myself am least interfered with that way." No regret. No self-deception (*it is impossible to be neutral*). A clear conscience (*I like neither to give nor to take injury*). In other words, true resignation—this circumstance is as it is, and it will not and should not be otherwise. There is a certain intensity of joy possible after resignation of this order, greater than we frustrated hopers know. (Where do I fit into this scheme? I think I have discovered one thing about myself from contemplating Ruth's maxim: that is, I want profoundly to be a disher, but my training has been such, or perhaps I am only so weak, that I am incapable of being one with a clear conscience. Consequently I find myself in a halfway position—dishing it out, yes, but at the behest of people I have never seen, and to people I will never know.) Ruth took a job with the NRACP for the only right reason—not for any of my complicated ones nor for the general greed, but because she saw quite clearly that here was one of the very pure instances of getting it and dishing it out. She left a job as secretary to an executive in General Electric for this. I think she gets a certain pleasure from seeing her philosophy so exquisitely borne out by event. Ruth is 27. I think I am in love with her. I am sure she is not in love with me.

Tell me, Herb, does not this maxim ring a bell in you? Can you not recognize, as I do, the rightness of it? This girl has had the courage to put into deliberate words her sense of the inevitable. Do you not admire her for it? And is she not right? She is right enough. If you doubt it, let me tell you what our job here is.

The authorities consider the situation potentially explosive enough to warrant the most elaborate system of censorship I have ever heard of. To begin with, there is a rule that during his first week in the Reserve every Negro may write three letters to persons on the outside. After that period is over, only one letter a month is permitted. Now all letters leaving here during the first week are sent to PR where they are censored and typed in the correct form (on NRACP letterhead); the typed copies are sent

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

on and the originals are filed. The reason for this elaborate system is interesting enough, and probably sound; every endeavor is to be made to discourage any leaking out of adverse reports on conditions in the CPR. There are some fourteen million Negroes in the nation, not all of whom are entirely pleased with the prospect of being relocated; and there are an indeterminate number of Caucasian sympathizers—civil liberties fanatics for the most part—who could cause trouble if any confirmation of their suspicions about the CPR should leak out. We have put out a staggering amount of data on the climatic, agricultural, power production and mining conditions of the region; and we have propagandized with every device in the book. Yet we know well enough how long it takes for propaganda to counteract prejudice, and sometimes how deceptive an apparent propaganda success can be. We are more than grateful that almost the entire news outlet system of the nation is on our side.

Well then, after the three letters of the first week have been typed and sent, the writer's job begins. Every effort is made to discourage the interned Negroes from writing to the outside. For one thing, we keep in our files all personal letters incoming during the first month. Anyone who continues to write to an internee after this month needs to be answered. The filing clerks keep track of the dates, and forward all personal letters to us. (The clerks think we send the letters on to the internees.) We then write appropriate responses to the letters, in the style of the internee as we estimate it from his three letters. We try to be as impersonal as possible, conveying the idea that everything is all right. Why do we not forward the letters to the internees to answer? First of all we do—if the internees request it. They are told that they will receive letters only from those persons whose letters they request to see, and such a request involves yards of red tape. Very few are expected to use the cumbersome mechanism at all. Then, we write the letters for them simply to save ourselves time and trouble. We would have a lot of rewriting to do anyway; this method assures us of complete control and an efficient *modus operandi.* Any outsider Negro who writes too

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

many insistent letters will be, at our request, relocated within a month; we do not want any unnecessary unhappiness to result from the necessarily painful program. Friends and relatives are to be reunited as fast as possible. Whole communities are to be relocated together, to avoid whatever wrenches in personal relationships we can avoid.

Is not this getting it and dishing it out on a fine scale? All for very good reasons, I know. But then, is it not conceivable that there are always good reasons for the old crapperoo? Sometimes I feel absolutistic enough to say—if it's this bad, for any ultimate reason whatsoever, then to hell with it. After which sentiment, comes the gun at the head. But then reason reinstates my sense of the relativity of values, and on I go writing a letter to Hector Jackson of South Carolina explaining that I've been so busy putting up a chickenhouse and plowing that I haven't had a chance to write but I hope to see you soon. (I doubt if I will.)

ANDY

I forgot to mention—I have a special job, which is to censor the letters of all the clerical personnel in PR. One of my duties is to censor any reference to the censorship! A strange state of affairs. None of them know that this job is mine; most think the censor must be some Mail Department employee. I must say you look at some people with new eyes after reading their correspondence.

I need hardly say, but if there is any doubt I will say, that this letter is absolutely confidential. How much of our system will become publicly known, I cannot guess; but naturally I don't want to jump the official gun in this regard.

April 12

Dear Herb,

Let me tell you about the strange adventure I had last evening. I am still not quite sure what to make of it.

Immediately after work I picked up a few sandwiches and a pint of whiskey, and walked out into the desert on one of my hikes. One more meal with the jabber of the café and one more

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

of those good but always good in the same way dinners, and I felt I should come apart at the seams. (Another thing I have learned about myself—I am ill adapted to prison life.) I had no goal in view. I intended to stroll.

But I found myself heading generally in the direction of the hill from which I had looked over the Tehuala Valley and the city of CPR Intake buildings. I came across nothing particularly interesting in a natural history way, so that by early dusk I was near to the hill; I decided to climb it again and see what I could see.

The first thing I saw, in the difficult light of dusk, was a soldier with a gun standing at the foot of the hill. I came around a large clump of cactus, and there he was, leaning on his rifle. He immediately pointed it at me, and told me to go back where I belonged. I objected that I had climbed this hill before and I could see no reason why I shouldn't do it again. He replied that he didn't see any reason either, but I couldn't just the same; they were going to put up another fence to keep people like me away. I cursed, at the whole situation; if I had dared I would have cursed him too, for he had been rude as only a guard with a gun can be. Then, before I left, I pulled out my pint and took a slug of it. The guard was a changed man.

"Christ," he said, "give me a pull."

"I should give you a pull."

"Come on," he said, "I ain't had a drop since I came to this hole. They won't even give us beer."

"All right," I replied, "if you'll tell me what the hell's going on around here."

He made me crouch behind a Joshua tree, and he himself would not look at me while he talked. I asked him why all the precautions.

"They got a searchlight up top the hill, with machine guns. They sweep the whole hill all the time. They can see plain as day in the dark. They keep an eye on us fellows down here. I know. I used to run the light."

"I haven't seen any light," I said.

He glanced at me with scorn.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"It's black," he said. "They cut down all the bushes all around the top part of that hill. Anybody comes up in the bare place—pttt! *Any*body. Even a guard."

"I still don't see any light."

"Man, it's black light. You wear glasses and shine this thing and you can see better than you can with a regular light searchlight. It's the stuff. We used to shoot rabbits with it. The little bastards never knew what hit them!"

I didn't want to appear simple, so I didn't ask any more questions about the black light. He was an irascible fellow, with a gun and a knife, and he had drunk most of the bottle already.

"Why do you let me stay at all?" I asked.

"Can't see good in the dusk. Not even them can't."

I couldn't think of anything more to say. I felt overwhelmed.

"I used to be guard on the railroad they got inside. Say, have they got a system. Trains from the outside go through a automatic gate. All the trainmen get on the engine and drive out. Then we come up through another automatic gate and hook on and drag it in. Always in the daytime. Anybody tried to hop train, inside or out, pttt! Air-conditioned box cars made out of steel. Two deep they come. Never come in at night."

"Are you married?" I asked.

"Ain't nobody married up front, huh?" I didn't answer. "There ain't, ain't there?"

"No, but there could be if anybody felt like it."

"Well, there ain't even a woman inside. Not a damn one. They let us have all the nigger women we want. Some ain't so bad. Most of them fight a lot."

He smashed the pint bottle on a rock nearby.

"Why didn't you bring some real liquor, god damn you?" he said in a low voice full of violence. "Get the hell back home where you belong. Get out of here. It's getting dark. I'll shoot the guts out of you too. Bring me something I can use next time, huh? Get going.—Stay under cover," he shouted after me. "They're likely to get you if they spot you. They can't miss if it's dark enough."

The last I heard of him he was coughing and spitting and

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

swearing. I was as disgusted as scared, and I must confess I was scared stiff.

I walked homeward bound, slowly recovering my emotional balance, trying to understand what had happened to me with that guard, the meaning of what he had told me. For some absurd reason the tune "In the Gloaming, O, My Darling" kept running through my head in the idiotic way tunes will, so that I was unable to concentrate intelligently upon the situation. (I wonder why that tune business happens.)

I heard a sound at some distance to my left. I stopped, suddenly and inexplicably alarmed to the point of throbbing temples and clenched fists. I saw a slim figure in brown among the cactus; and then, as the figure approached, I could see it was a young woman. She did not see me, but her path brought her directly to where I was standing. I did not know whether to accost her at a distance or to let her come upon me where I stood. By the time I had decided not to accost her, I could see it was Ruth.

"Why, Ruth!" I cried, with all the emotion of relief and gratified surprise in my voice, and perhaps something more. "What are you doing here?"

She started badly, then seeing who it was she hurried up to me and to my intense surprise took my arms and put them around her body.

"Andy," she said, "I am so glad to see you. Some good angel must have put you here for me."

I squeezed her, we kissed, a friendly kiss, then she drew away and shook herself. She had almost always called me Mr. Dixon before; there was a real affection in her "Andy."

"What's the matter?" I asked her. "Where have you been?"

"I didn't know you took walks too."

"Oh, yes. It's one way to keep from going nuts."

She laughed a little, and squeezed my arm. I could not refrain from kissing her again, and this time it was not just a friendly kiss.

"Where did you go?" I asked again.

"To that hill. I went up there a couple of times before. There was a guard there wanted to lay me."

We didn't speak for a few moments.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"I think he almost shot me for giving him the brush-off. I didn't look back when I left, but I heard him click his gun. You don't know how glad I was to see you."

So we kissed again, and this time it was serious.

"Wait a minute," she said, "wait a minute."

She unlocked her arm from mine, and we continued on our way not touching.

"I had some trouble with a guard too," I said. "I wonder why they're so damned careful to keep us away."

"Mine told me they didn't want us to get any funny ideas. He said things aren't what they seem to be in there."

"Didn't you ask him what he meant?"

"Sure. That's when he said I'd better shut up and let him lay me, or else he'd shoot me. So I walked off. I'm not going to call on *him* again."

I put my arm around her—I can't tell you how fond I was of her at that moment, of her trim, poised body, her courage, her good humor, her delightful rich voice and laughter—but she only kissed me gently and withdrew.

"I want to keep my head for a while, darling," she said.

I knew what she meant. We walked on in silence, hand in hand. It was moonlight. This time if I was lightheaded I knew why.

When we were about half a mile from our buildings, we came across O'Doone also returning from a walk.

"Well," he said brightly, "it *is* a nice moon, isn't it?"

It wouldn't do to say that we had met by accident; I was embarrassed, but Ruth's fine laugh cleared the air for me.

"Nicest I ever saw," she said.

"Did you ever walk up that hill," I asked him, "where you can see out over the valley?"

"Once," he said in a surprisingly harsh voice. "I'd rather play chess."

So we went into one of the recreation rooms, and O'Doone beat me at three games of chess. Ruth sat by, knitting—a sweater for a cousin's baby. We talked little, but comfortably. It would have been a domestic scene, if it had not been for the fifty or sixty other people in the room.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Herb, what does it all mean?

ANDY

April 20

Dear Herb,

(This is a *Prior* Script. If all goes well you will receive this letter from Ruth's cousin, who will be informed by O'Doone's sister to forward it to you. O'Doone's sister will also send you instructions on how to make the invisible ink visible. When I wrote the letter, I was in a self-destructive frame of mind; I was prepared to take all the certainly drastic consequences that would come from its being read by someone of authority. But O'Doone's invisible ink (what a strange fellow to have brought a quart of it here! He said he had brought it only to play mysterious letter-games with his nephew—I wonder) and Ruth's baby sweater, upon the wrapping of which I write this, combined to save me. If the authorities catch *this,* I don't care what happens. It takes so long to write lightly enough in invisible ink for no pen mark to show on the paper, that I doubt if I will have the patience to use it often. Most of my letters will be innocuous in regular ink. I may add an invisible note or two, between the lines, in the margin, at the end. O'Doone says it's not any of the ordinary kinds and if we're careful the authorities are not likely to catch us. O'Doone is strange. He refused to take this whole ink matter for anything more than a big joke—as though we were digging a tunnel under a house, O'Doone pretending we are just tunneling in a straw-stack to hide our marbles, myself trying to protest (but being laughed at for my lapse in taste) that we are really undermining a house in order to blow it up. Which perhaps we are. In any event, I don't have the energy left to rewrite this letter; I'll merely copy it off, invisibly.)

I cannot tell you how shocked I was to discover the familiar, black, censor's ink over five lines in your last letter. The censor censored! I had not thought of that. In my innocence I had thought that we writers in the higher brackets could be trusted to be discreet. One would think I was still a loyal subscriber to

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

the *Nation,* I was so naive. But no—I am trusted to censor the letters of inferiors (I suspect my censorship is sample-checked by someone), but my own letters are themselves inspected and their dangerous sentiments excised. And, irony of ironies! your own references to the fact that my letters were censored were themselves blacked out.

Who is it that does this? The head of PR here? That's a strange way to make him waste his time. One of his assistants? Then the head must censor the assistant's letters. And the chief board of the NRACP censors the head's letters? And the President theirs? And God his? And ——?

Which is the more imprisoned—the jailer who thinks he is free and is not, or the prisoner who knows the precise boundaries of his liberty and accepting them explores and uses all the world he has?

I am a jailer who knows he is not free. I am a prisoner who does not know the limits of his freedom. And all this I voluntarily submitted to in the name of a higher freedom. Ever since my adolescence, when the New Deal was a faith, liberty has been one of the always repeated, never examined articles of my creed. Well, I have been examining liberty recently, and she's a pure fraud.

One thing I have learned—you don't just quietly put yourself on the side of Ruth's dishers, you become one of them yourself; and a disher *has* to dish it out, he cannot help it at all; and he pays for it. Or maybe I am only paying for my guilt-making desire to be a more important disher than I am.

Ruth was surprised at my distress upon receiving your censored letter. She only shrugged. What had I expected, after all? It was inevitable, it was a necessity. That's the key word, Herb—Necessity. Not liberty, Necessity. True liberty is what the prisoner has, because he accepts Necessity. That's the great thing, Herb, to recognize and accept Necessity.

I've slowly been working toward a realization of this. I think my decision to work in the NRACP came from recognizing the social necessity of it. The Negro problem in America was acute

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

and was insoluble by any liberal formula; this solution gives dignity and independence to the Negroes; it staves off the Depression by the huge demand for manufactured products, for transportation, for the operations of the NRACP itself; but perhaps most important of all, it establishes irrevocably in the American people's mind the wisdom and rightness of the government; for if capitalism must go (as it must) it should be replaced peaceably by a strong and wise planned state. Such a state we are proving ourselves to be. Very well. I accepted this. But what I forgot was that *I*, I the individual, I Andrew Dixon, must personally submit to the stringencies of necessity. The relics of the New Deal faith remained to clutter up my new attitude. This experience, coming when and as it did, particularly coming when Ruth's courageous wisdom was nearby to support me, has liberated me (I hope) into the greater freedom of the Prisoner of Necessity.

Such are my pious prayers at least. I cannot say I am sure I fully understand all the strictures of necessity. I *can* say I do not enjoy those I understand. But pious I will remain.

Remember the days when we thought we could *change* Necessity? Democracy and all that? How much older I feel!

ANDY

May 1

Mary my dear:

Please let me apologize—sincerely too, Mary—for having neglected you so cruelly for the past months. Herb tells me you are quite put out, and well you might be. I can find no excuses for it, but this I will stoutly maintain—it was not a question of hostility or indifference to you, my dear. Actually I have been going through something of a crisis, as Herb may have been telling you. It has something to do with the desert, and something to do with the NRACP, and a lot to do with the charming young woman whose picture I enclose. She is Ruth Cone. We are getting married in a couple of Sundays—Mother's Day. Why Mother's Day, I really don't know. But she wants it, so there's no help. The details of our plighting troth might amuse you.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

A couple of evenings ago I was playing chess in the recreation room with a man named O'Doone, my only friend here. Ruth was sitting beside us knitting some rompers for a cousin's baby. From time to time we would chat a little; it was all very comfortable and unromantic. O'Doone, between games, went to the toilet. When he had left, Ruth said to me with a twinkle in her eye, "Andy darling, don't you see what I am doing?" I replied, "Why yes, my sweet, knitting tiny garments. Is it—?" And we both laughed heartily. It was a joke, you see, a mild comfortable little joke, and no one would have thought of it a second time except that when we had finished laughing it was no longer a joke. Her face became very sober, and I am sure mine did too. I said, "Do you want children, Ruth?" "Yes," she replied. "Do you want to have my children?" "Yes," she said again, without looking at me. Then with the most charming conquest of modesty that you can imagine, she turned her serious little face to me, and we very lightly kissed. O'Doone had returned by then. "Well," he said in a bright way, "do I interrupt?" "Not at all," I answered; "we have just decided to get married." He burbled a little, in caricature of the overwhelmed, congratulating friend, pumped our hands, and asked us when we were marrying. "I don't know," I said. "Why not tomorrow?" "Oh no," said Ruth severely, "how can I assemble my trousseau?" At which O'Doone went off into a braying laugh, and we set up the chess pieces. "Bet you five to one," he said, "I win this game in less than sixty moves." I wouldn't take his bet. It took him about forty moves to beat me.

And thus did Dixon and Cone solemnly vow to share their fortunes.

It's the first marriage in PR. Everybody will attend. The chief promised me Monday off and temporary quarters in one of the guest suites. We are to get a two-room apartment in the new dormitory that is nearly completed. Such privacy and spaciousness will make us the envy of the whole community. I'm sure there will be a spate of marriages as soon as the dormitory is completed. We will not be married by a holy man, partly because neither of us believes in it and partly because there isn't one of any kind

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

on the premises. (I wondered why those detailed questions about religious beliefs on our application forms.) There was a little trouble at first about who was authorized to marry people here. The PR chief, as the only person permitted to leave the place, went out and got himself authorized to do it legally. I think he rather fancies himself in the capacity of marrier. He runs to paternalism.

Ruth urges me, Mary—she assumes, quite rightly, that I have not done it already—to tell you some of the homely details of life here. Of our sleeping rooms, the less said the better. The beds are comfortable period. We live quite communally, but very well. There's a fine gymnasium, with swimming pool and play fields attached—tennis, baseball, squash, fencing, everything but golf. There's the best library (surely the best!) in the world on American Negro affairs, and a reasonably good one of modern literature. We have comfortable working quarters—with long enough hours to be sure. There is a fine desert for us to walk around in, and I have come to need an occasional stroll in the desert for spiritual refreshment. And we eat handsomely, except for vegetables. In fact, the only complaint that I have of the cooking is the monotony of its excellence—roast, steak, chop, stew. Never, or seldom, liver and kidneys and omelettes and casseroles. And always frozen vegetables. Well, probably the Negroes will be producing plenty of vegetables within a few weeks. There's lots of liquor of every kind. There is a sort of department store where one can buy everything one needs and most of the luxuries one could want in this restricted life. There's a movie a week—double-feature with news and cartoon—and bridge or poker every day. A microcosmic plenitude.

Well, as for the rest of our routine life here, I can think of nothing interesting enough to mention. We work and avoid work, backbite, confide, suspect. It's a bureaucratic existence, no doubt of that.

Will this epistle persuade you to forgive me?

Now you must write to me—soon.

Devotedly yours,

ANDY

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

(*In invisible ink*)

O'Doone, who sometimes gives his opinions very obliquely, came to me today with some disturbing figures. He wasn't in the least jaunty about them, and I must confess that I am not either.

According to *Time,* which seems to know more about the CPR than we do, there have been about 50,000 Negroes interned already, and these 50,000 include nearly all the wealthy and politically powerful Negroes in the nation (including an objectionable white-supremacy Senator one of whose great-great grandmothers turns out to have been black). The leaders were interned first, reasonably enough, to provide the skeleton of government and system in the new State which they are to erect. *But,* O'Doone points out, we have yet to receive from them a request for letters from an outsider; and if any Negroes at all are going to make such requests, it must surely be these, the most important, the least afraid of red tape. (He also pointed out that not one of the entertainers or athletes of prominence has been interned. That, I'm afraid, is all too easily explained.) You see, says O'Doone, you see? But he didn't say Why? to me, and I'm glad he didn't for I can't even guess why.

Another statistic he had, concerned the CPR itself. We all know that the figures on natural resources in the CPR are exaggerated. Grossly. Fourteen million people cannot possibly live well in this area, and O'Doone demonstrated that fact to me most convincingly. The Negro problem, economically, in the U. S. has been that they provided a larger cheap labor market than consumer market. Now the false stimulus of capitalizing their beginnings here will keep American industry on an even keel for years and years, but after that what? O'Doone bowed out at that point, but I think I can press the point a little further. They will provide a market for surplus commodities, great enough to keep the pressures of capitalism from blowing us sky-high, meanwhile permitting the transition to a planned State to take place. Very astute, I think, very astute indeed.

June 12

Dear Herb,

Why I have not written, you ought to be able to guess. I will

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

not pretend to any false ardors about Ruth. She is wise and winning as a woman, and everything one could ask for as a wife. I love her dearly. She has not read very widely or profoundly, but I think she is going to do something about that, soon. We are very happy together and I think we shall continue to be happy during the difficult years to come. What more can I say?

Why are happiness and contentment and the sense of fulfillment so hard to write about? I can think of nothing to say, and besides Ruth is just coming in from tennis (it's 9:30 Sunday morning).

10 *p. m.*

Ruth has gone to bed, so I will continue in another vein.

I have been discovering that the wells of pity, which have lain so long locked and frozen in my eyes, are thawed in me now. I am enclosing a letter which came in from a Negress in Chicago to her lover, in the CPR, and his response. It is the first letter from inside, except for the usual three during the first week, that I have read. Apparently a few have been coming out now and then, but this is my first one. I cannot tell you how I pitied both these unhappy people. When Ruth read them, she said, "My, what a mean man! I hope he has to collect garbage all his life." I cannot agree with her. I think his little note betrays an unhappiness as great as the woman's, and even more pitiable for being unrecognized, unappreciated. Judge for yourself. I can think of nothing to add.

ANDY

> Honey dear child, why don't you write to me? Don't you even remember all those things you told me you'd do no matter what? And you're not even in jail, you just in that place where we all going to go to sooner or later. O I sure hope they take me there with you. I can't live without you. But I don't even know who to ask to go there with you. I went to the policeman and they said they didn't know nothing about it. I don't know what to do. You don't know how I ache for you honey. It's just like I got a tooth pulled out but it ain't no tooth it's worse, and there is no dentist for it neither. There's a fellow at the store keeps

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

bothering me now and again, but I assure him I don't want him I got a man. I thought I had a man, you, but I don't hear nothing from you. Maybe you got something there, I don't see how you could do it not after those things you said, but if you have tell me so I can go off in some hole and die. I don't want this Lee Lawson, he's no good, it's you I want, sweetheart, you tell me it's all right. I *got* to hear from you or I'll just die.

Dear ————,

I've been so busy baby, you wouldn't believe how busy I've been. You'll be coming here pretty soon and then you'll feel better too. It's nice here. We'll get along fine then. You tell that guy to leave you be. You're my gal. Tell him I said so.

Yours truly,

————

(*In invisible ink*)

I didn't include these letters because I thought they were in the Heloise-Abelard class, but because I wanted to say something about them, and also because they gave me more invisible space.

The man's response came to us already typed. That very much astonished me, and O'Doone, when I told him, let fly a nasty one. "I suppose," he said, "they have a couple of writers in there writing a few letters in place of the Negroes, which we then relay. Complicated, isn't it?" Not complicated, upsetting. Devastating. What if it were true? (And I must say this letter has an air more like the PR rewrite-formula than like a real letter. Then *none* of the Negroes would have even a filtered connection with the outside world. Why? Why fool even us? Is there no end to the deception and doubt of this place?

O'Doone posed another of his puzzles yesterday. He read in the current PR weekly bulletin that the CPR has been shipping whole trainloads of leather goods and canned meats to China and Europe for relief purposes, under the government's supervision of course. O'Doone came into my office at once, waving the bulletin and chortling. "How do you like it?" he cried. "Before we get a carrot out of them the Chinese get tons of meat." Then a sudden light seemed to dawn on his face. "Where did all the cattle come from?"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

A strange thing happened: O'Doone's intelligent, sensitive face collapsed. The great domed forehead remained almost unwrinkled, but his features looked somehow like one of those children's rubber faces which collapse when you squeeze them. No anguish, no anxiety. Only collapse. He left without a word. I wish he had never come here with that news.

Last night I lay awake till three or four o'clock. I could hear trucks and trains rumbling occasionally throughout the night—entering and leaving the Reserve. But that guard I met at the foot of the hill told me that they only bring internees in the daytime. Are those shipments? How can it be? Sometimes I am sick at heart with doubt and uncertainty.

I dreamt last night that I was a Gulliver, lying unbound and unresisting on the ground while a thousand Lilliputians, all of them black, ate at me. I would not write the details of that dream even in invisible ink. Not even in plain water.

July 4

Dear Herb,

Hail Independence Day! Some of the overgrown kids around here are shooting off firecrackers. No one is working. It is all very pleasant. I suppose March 20 will be the Independence Day of the new Negro nation—the day when the first trainload arrived. How long ago that seems already. I do not think I have ever been through so much in so short a time. And now for the real news.

Ruth is pregnant! Amazing woman, she remains outwardly as humorous and self-contained as ever. No one else knows her condition, because she wants to avoid as much as possible of the female chatter that goes with pregnancy. She insists upon playing tennis still. Yet she is not all calmness and coolness; when we are lying in bed together before going to sleep, she croons little nonsense hymns to pregnancy in my ear, and yesterday afternoon at the office she walked into my cubicle, up to where I was sitting very solemnly, and placed my hand over her womb. Then she kissed me with a sort of unviolent passion such as I have never known before in my life. I tell you, she's a wonderful woman.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

How miraculous is conception and growth! I no more understand such things than I really understand about the stars and their rushings. One event follows another, but I'm sure I don't know why. You get back to an archaic awe, if you permit yourself to, realizing that you yourself have started off a chain of miracles. I never had a sense of littleness when observing the naked heavens, of man's puniness, of my own nothingness. Perhaps it was a fear of that feeling which for so long prevented me from looking upwards at all. I mentioned my reaction to O'Doone on one of the first occasions of our meeting; he nodded and said, "But is not a man more complex than a star, and in every way but one that we know of, more valuable?" What he said remains with me yet; and when I am presented with the vastness of the stars and the forces which operate within them, I am impressed and excited enough but I am not depressed by the imagined spectacle. Their bigness does not make me little. My own complexity does not make them simple. Man is no longer the center of the universe perhaps, but neither is anything else. That I have learned.

But when I am presented with the proof of the powers that men (and myself) possess, then I still feel a little off balance. When Clarice was pregnant with Betty, I had no such feeling. I felt annoyed chiefly. But now, in this desert, in the CPR, I have been sent back at last to fundamentals, to the sources of things; and I realize fully how unaccountable is birth of life. Ruth, who never departed far from the sources, is less embarrassed in admitting her sense of mystery.

One thing I am going to teach this child, if it can be taught anything: that the humane tradition has been tried and found wanting. It's over, finished, kaput. A new era of civilization commences. Kindness and freedom—once they were good for something, but no more. *Put yourself in his place*—never. Rather, fight to stay where you are. I think we are entering upon an age of reason and mystery. Reason which accepts and understands the uttermost heights and depths of human power, man's depravity and his nobility; and, understanding these, dares use them toward a great and future goal, the goal of that stern order

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

which is indispensable to the fullest development of man. Mystery toward all that is not explainable, which is a very great deal. Rationalism failed, for it asserted that everything was ultimately explainable. We know better. We know that to destroy a man's sense of mystery is to cut him off at one of the sources of life. Awe, acceptance, faith—these are wonderful sources of power and fulfillment. I have discovered them. My child shall never forget them.

ANDY

(*In invisible ink*)

I have put the gun to my temple, Herb, I have pointed the knife at my heart. But my nerve failed me. There were a few days when I was nearly distracted. My division chief told me to stay home till I looked better, but I dared not. I think it was only Ruth's pregnancy that saved me. My newly awakened sense of mystery, plus my powers of reason, have saved me. This is the third letter I have written you in a week, but I knew the others were wild and broken, and I was not sure at all that I was physically able to write in such a manner as to avoid detection.

It came to a head, for me, two weeks ago. O'Doone entered my office, his face looking bright and blasted. He dropped a booklet on my desk and left after a few comments of no importance. The booklet was an anthropologist's preliminary report on certain taboos among American Negroes. The fellow had been interviewing them in Intake. There was nothing of special interest about it that I could see, except that it was written in the past tense.

I expected O'Doone to reclaim the booklet any day. For some reason he had always done the visiting to me, not I to him. He was very restless, and I am slothful. But a week passed, and no O'Doone. I did not meet him in the café nor in the recreation room. I went to his own room, but he did not answer. The next day I went to his office, and his secretary told me he had not shown up for two days. I returned to his room. It was locked. The janitor unlocked it for me. When I entered I saw him lying

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

dead on his bed. "Well, old boy," I said to drive the janitor away, I don't know why, "feeling poorly?" He had drunk something. There was a glass on the table by his bed. There was no note. His face was repulsive. (That is a mystery I have learned to respect, how hideous death is.) He was cold, and somehow a little sticky to the touch. I covered his face with a towel, and sat down. I knew I should call someone, but I did not want to. I knew the janitor would remember letting me in, and my staying too long. Yet I felt that there was something I must do. What it was I could not remember, something important. It took me an eternity to remember—the invisible ink. I knew where he had kept it. It was not there. I looked throughout his room, and it was simply gone. I left the room.

I still did not notify anyone of his suicide. I was not asking myself why he had done it. Or perhaps I was only shouting Where's the ink? in a loud voice to cover up the little question Why? I went to our rooms and straight to the liquor shelf. I took down the Scotch and poured myself a stiff one, and drank. It was horrible. I spat it out, cursing; then I recognized the odor. O'Doone had come over, poured out the Scotch (I hope he enjoyed it himself) and filled the bottle with the invisible ink. At that, I broke down in the most womanish way, and cried on the bed (never ask Why? Why? Why?).

Ruth found me there some time later. I told her everything that had happened, and she immediately pulled me together. She had the sense to know I had been acting more oddly than was wise. She notified the right people, and O'Doone was disposed of. No one asked me any embarrassing questions, and no official mention of O'Doone's end was made anywhere.

I must continue this on a birthday card.

(*In invisible ink, on a large, plain Happy Birthday card to Mary*)

I had still not allowed myself to ask why he had done it, but Ruth put the thing in a short sentence. "He was too soft-hearted to stand it here." She was right; he was a Christian relic. He knew more than he could bear. I resolved to go that very evening

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

again to the hill where the black searchlight threatened the night.

Some sandwiches. Four half-pints of whiskey. A hunting-knife (a foolish gesture, I know). Plain drab clothes. The long walk in the still hot, late-afternoon sun. Sunset. The huge, sudden twilight. And I was within sight of a guard (not the same one I had seen before) standing by the new fence at the foot of the hill.

I crept up toward him under cover of brush and cactus, till I was close enough to toss a half-pint of whiskey in his direction. His bored, stupid face immediately became animated by the most savage emotions. He leveled his gun and pointed it in my general direction. He could not see me, however, and rather than look for me he crouched, eyes still searching the underbrush, to reach for the bottle. He drained it in five minutes.

"Throw me some more," he whispered loudly.

"Put the gun down."

I aimed my voice away from him, hoping that he would not spot me. I was lying flat beneath a large clump of sagebrush. There was a Joshua tree nearby, and several cactus plants. He pointed the gun at one of the stalks of cactus, and crept up toward it. Then he suddenly stopped, I don't know why, and walked back to his post.

"What yer want?" he asked.

I tossed out another bottle. He jumped again; then he got it and drank it.

"What's going on in there?" I asked him.

"They're fixing up the niggers," he said. "You know as much about it as I do."

He began to sing "O Susannah" in a sentimental voice. It was beginning to get too dark for my safety. I was desperate.

I tossed out another bottle, only not so far this time. When he leaned for it, I said very clearly, "You look like a butcher."

He deliberately opened the bottle and drank off half of it.

"Butcher, huh? Butcher?" he laid down his gun and took his villainous knife out. "I'm no butcher. I won't have nothing to do with the whole slimy mess. I won't eat them. No, sir, you

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

can do that for me. But I can do a little carving, I think. No butcher, you son of a bitch. You dirty prying niggereating son of a bitch. I'll learn you to call me a butcher."

He was stalking the cactus again. He lunged forward at it, and with much monotonous cursing and grunting dealt with it murderously. Meanwhile I crawled out on the other side of the sagebrush and ran for it. He never shot at me. Nothing happened, except that I too ran full tilt into a cactus, and had to walk hours in agony of flesh as well as of spirit. I vomited and retched till I thought I would be unable to walk further.

I must continue this letter some other way.

ANDY

(*In invisible ink, on the papers wrapping another sweater for Ruth's cousin's baby*)

I told Ruth nothing of what I had learned. Not even *her* great sense of the inevitable could survive such a shock, I think. Yet sometimes it seems to me that she must surely know it all. I do not want to know whether she knows. Could I support it if she did?

It was more painful pulling the cactus needles out than it had been acquiring them. But she removed them all, bathed the little wounds with alcohol and put me to bed. The next morning I awoke at seven and insisted upon going to work. I sat all day in my office, eating crackers and drinking milk. I didn't accomplish a thing. It was that day my chief told me to take it easy for a while. I was in a sort of stupor for a couple of days; yet I insisted, to everyone's consternation, on going to work. I accomplished nothing, and I intended to accomplish nothing. It was just that I could not tolerate being alone. In fact, today was the first day I have been alone for more than five minutes since I returned from the walk. But today I have regained a kind of composure, or seeming of composure, which for a time I despaired of ever possessing again. And I know that by the time I have given shape enough to my thoughts to put them on this paper for you to read, I shall have gained again a peace of mind. To have you to

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

write to, Herb, that is the great thing at this point. Without you there, I do not know what I would have done.

So much for my emotions. My thinking, my personal philosophy, has gone through at least as profound an upheaval as they.

In the chaos of my mind, in which huge invisible chunks of horror hit me unexpectedly from unexpected angles again and again, my first coherent and sensible idea came in the form of a question. "Why did they make it possible for me to find out what has been going on?" For I finally realized that it was no fluke that I had discovered it. Or O'Doone either. Or anyone with the suspicions and the courage for it. When the atom bombs were being produced, the whole vast undertaking was carried off without a single leak to the outside. Therefore, if I had been able in so simple a way to find out what had been going on in the CPR, it was only because they didn't care. They could have stopped me.

Then I thought: invisible ink is scarcely new in the history of things. Perhaps they have been reading my correspondence with you all along and will smile at this letter as they have smiled at others; or perhaps they haven't taken the trouble to read it, because they simply don't care.

Perhaps the authorities not only did not care if we gradually found out, but wanted us to.

Why should they want us to? Why, if that were true, should they have put up so formidable a system of apparent preventatives? Double fences, censorship, lies, etc., etc.?

The only answer that makes sense is this. They want the news gradually and surreptitiously to sift out to the general population—illegally, in the form of hideous rumors to which people can begin to accustom themselves. After all, everyone knew generally that something like the atom bomb was being manufactured. Hiroshima was not the profound and absolute shock in 1945 that it would have been in 1935, and a good deal of the preparation for its general acceptance was rumor. It is in the people's interest that the CPR function as it does function, and especially so that they can pretend that they have nothing to

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

do with it. The experience of the Germans in the Jew-extermination camps demonstrated that clearly enough. It would do no good for me to go around crying out the truth about NRACP, because few would believe me in the first place and my suppression would only give strength to the rumors, which were required and planned for anyhow.

But I still had to set myself the task of answering Why? What drove them (whoever they are) to the decision to embark upon a course which was not only revolutionary but dangerous? I accepted the NRACP as inevitable, as Necessity; there remained only the task of trying to understand wherein lay the mystery of the Necessity and of adjusting myself to the situation. The individual, even the leader, has no significant choice to make in the current of event; that current is part of natural law; it is unmoral, cruel, wasteful, useless, and mysterious. The leader is he who sees and points out the course of history, that we may pursue that course with least pain. It is odd that we Americans have no such leader; what we have is committees and boards and bureau heads who collectively possess leadership and who direct our way almost impersonally. There is nothing whatsoever that I myself would like so much as to be one of those wise, courageous, anonymous planners. The wisdom I think that I possess. But in place of courage I have a set of moral scruples dating from an era when man was supposed to have a soul and when disease took care of overpopulation. The old vestigial values of Christianity must be excised in the people as they are being excised in me. The good and the lucky are assisting at the birth of a new age. The weak and unfit are perishing in the death of an old. Which shall it be for us?

For my own part, I think I am in a state of transition, from being one of the unfit to being one of the fit. I feel it. I will it. There are certain external evidences of it. For example, I was face to face with the truth at the end of April, but instead of acknowledging what I saw I turned to my love for Ruth. Yet that refusal to recognize the truth did not long survive the urgings of my sense of necessity. And I remember, when being

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

confronted with piecemeal evidences of the truth, that I was unable to explain a number of them. You know, Herb, how accomplished a rationalizer I can be; yet this time I did not even *try* to rationalize about many of the facts.

—It is dawn outside. I cannot read this letter over, so I am not entirely sure how incoherent it is. I feel that I have said most of what I wanted to say. I am not very happy. I think I shall sleep the better for having written this. I eat nothing but bread and fruit and milk. A bird is singing outside; he is making the only sound in the world. I can see the hill which separates us from the Intake buildings. It's a pleasant hill, rather like an arm extending out from the valley sides, and I am glad it is there. I am cold now, but in three hours it will be warm and in five hours hot. I am rambling I know. But suddenly all my energy has leaked out. I walk to the door to see Ruth so happily sleeping, mysteriously replenishing life from this nightly portion of death, and I think of that baby she is bearing and will give birth to. If it were not for her and the baby, I am sure I should have gone mad. Is not that a mystery, Herb? Our child shall be fortunate; it is the first conscious generation of each new order in whom the greatest energy is released. There are splendid things ahead for our child.

It is not my fault. I did not know what I was doing. How could I have known? What can I do now?

I stare at the lightening sky, exhausted. I do not know why I do not say farewell, and go to bed. Perhaps it is because I do not want to hear that little lullaby that sings in my ears whenever I stop: I have eaten human flesh, my wife is going to have a baby; I have eaten human flesh, my wife is going to have a baby.

Remember, back in the simple days of the Spanish Civil War, when Guernica was bombed, we speculated all one evening what the worst thing in the world could be? This is the worst thing in the world, Herb. I tell you, the worst. After this, nothing.

Perhaps if I lay my head against Ruth's breast and put her hands over my ears I can go to sleep. Last night I recited Hous-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

man's "Loveliest of trees, the cherry now," over and over till I went to sleep, not because I like it particularly but because I could think of nothing else at all to recite.

My wife is going to have a baby, my wife is going to have a baby, my wife is going to have a baby.

Bless you,

ANDY

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Two Poems

JAMES MERRILL

THE HOUSE

Whose west walls take the sunset like a blow
Will have turned the other cheek by morning, though
The long night falls between, as wise men know:

Wherein the wind, that daily we forgot,
Comes mixed with rain and, while we seek it not,
Appears against our faces to have sought

The contours of a listener in night air,
His profile bent as from pale windows where
Soberly once he learned what houses were.

Those darkening skies behind which trapped in amber
A bug has sneezed itself out of a slumber
To churn the various dust all things remember

Can quicken interest in the gross vein
That dyes a spirit ruddier far than stain
Of day did finial, cornice and windowpane:

So that whoever strolls on his launched lawn
At dusk, the hour of recompense, alone,
May stumbling on a sunken boundary stone

The loss of deed and structure apprehend:
And we who homeless toward such houses wend
May find we have dwelt elsewhere. Scholar and friend,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

After the twelve bright houses that each day
Presume to flatter what we most display,
Night is a cold house, a narrow doorway.

This door to no key opens, those to brass.
Behind it, warning of a deep excess,
The winds are. I have entered, nevertheless,

And seen the wet-faced sleepers the winds take
To heart; have felt their dreadful profits break
Beyond my seeing: at a glance they wake.

WILLOW

If not, why should the willow bend? It bends
High in the air, but to the stream descends
Dipping its as-we-call-them finger-ends

In weedy water: hence, a weeping tree,
We say, invoking in our imagery
Not much of willows: for to such as we

It was that branches lent, though covertly,
Movements more suave, guiding what pangs there be
Into a bearable choreography:

Our hands rehearsed the eloquent charade
Of willows: from the simple noises made
By creatures come to drink in the trees' shade

Came sobs of women weeping into their hands,
Performing easily all their pain demands,
Gesture and sound no child misunderstands:

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Because of this we never could recall
What we *did* bear, as under water all
Becomes a silvery weightless miracle

In which, presuming on the certitude
Of bodily grace, movements that in us wooed
Profounder levels rose to air renewed:

Thus, rocked by sorrows, never could we tell
How grave they were, our bodies knowing well
The signs to charm them, alter or dispel:

At times we thought, Body is all that grieves:
The hand has slanted (like the willow's leaves)
From touching faces it alone conceives

Downward to drop its pennies on shut eyes
Before the habit fades of their surprise
Past blood and tissue where remembrance lies.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Eliot's Moral Dialectic[1]

HUGH KENNER

DISCUSSION OF ELIOT'S POETRY AS A WHOLE has always been bedevilled by its notorious separability into "earlier" and "later." This distinction is less evident in the texts than in critical history; it would be easy to show that Eliot has had not so much a succession of manners as a succession of reputations, reputation in the world of reviewers and enlightened gossip being based on the most extrinsic factors in a poetic corpus. No sooner had Mr. Eliot rebuked the Noel Cowardish adherents who applauded his expressing, in *The Waste Land,* "the disillusionment of a generation," than as author of *Ash-Wednesday* he was being regarded as traitor to the banners of despair, and adopted as the congenial poet of a new intellectual milieu whose focus is less Bloomsbury than Canterbury. He has never concealed his intense concern with moral states; but when he turned his attention to moral states thought by professing Christians to be congenial, or at least desiderated, one group of admirers simply replaced another. The resulting earthquakes in the world of literary reputations grotesquely distort what actually happens in the book and on the page. It is not possible to show that *The Hollow Men* is agnostic on the premises that render *Ash-Wednesday* Christian, or that Mr. Eliot's omnivorous perspicacity or his dramatic skill are less evident in *Four Quartets* than in *Sweeney Agonistes.* The verse of *Four Quartets* has a different *texture* from that of *The Waste Land,* but this technical distinction, indicated in Mr. Eliot's dis-

[1] This essay is a chapter from a comprehensive study of T. S. Eliot being prepared in collaboration with Herbert Marshall McLuhan. While the present writer is fully responsible for the form in which it appears here, insights that have emerged from close collaborative discussion of the poems are present at many points.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

cussion, in his "Dante" essay, of opaque and transparent diction, cannot be held to justify such rapid fluctuations in market quotations allegedly based on congeniality of preoccupation alone. For Mr. Eliot has never changed his preoccupations. His poetic corpus constitutes a developing action, and the verse of *Four Quartets* differs from that of *Sweeney Agonistes* only as (to take a notorious instance) the verse of the last act of *Antony and Cleopatra* differs from that of the first. In this perspective, the onset of the *stil nuovo* enacts not a recantation but a third-act climax.

Poem is juxtaposed with poem, as line with line and word with word. The personae persist. Tiresias makes his initial appearance in *Mélange Adultère de Tout,* is metamorphosed in *Ash-Wednesday* and continues to "foresuffer all" in *East Coker.* Prufrock fills his most significant role as an anti-self to be purged away by Becket, just as twenty years earlier St. John the Baptist and Lazarus had presented themselves as anti-selves for Prufrock. The principles of dramatic organization that govern each poem govern also the *oeuvre*: without an understanding of this there can be no understanding of the poems. And those principles, which will be investigated in the next few pages, are not technical merely but moral; or technical only in the sense in which realized techniques are inseparable from the projection of a succession of moral worlds. They illuminate, for example, as we shall see, so baffling a poem—the reader may be surprised, but it has proved baffling—as *Ash-Wednesday.*

The assumption that it is a beautiful elaboration of Christian commonplaces probably explains why none of Eliot's later admirers has given a helpful analysis of *Ash-Wednesday,* just as embarrassment at its Christian content probably explains why even Dr. Leavis has not really succeeded. Contemporary criticism is dominated, the best like the worst, by a preoccupation with the moral worth of poetry: a theme acutely sensed but badly formulated. The critic who can elucidate a symbol-cluster with the aplomb of an Empson still fumbles at spiritual themes with the impeccable clumsiness of an Arnold. Of the latter Eliot writes,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

> Like many people the vanishing of whose religious faith has left behind only habits, he placed an exaggerated emphasis upon morals. Such people often confuse morals with their own good habits, the result of a sensible upbringing, prudence, and the absence of any very powerful temptation; but I do not speak of Arnold or of any particular person, for only God knows. Morals for the saint are only a preliminary matter; for the poet a secondary matter. How Arnold finds morals in poetry is not clear. . . . (*The Use of Poetry*, p. 114)

And what exactly is to be found admirable in *Ash-Wednesday*, when it is read as a search for faith, is not clear.[2] But there is no doubt that Eliot's contemporary reputation rests largely upon the notion that since it is admirable to be searching resolutely for faith, one ought to admire the poet who casts a lovely sentiment over this search: especially when, guided by Dante, he has stumbled into the right camp. "Mr. Eliot means what is meant by any Christian," writes a not unperceptive analyst, "and it should be clear that the experience behind the second half of *The Dry Salvages* is meant to suggest that of spiritual rebirth." For "any Christian" to imagine that he was in possession of the "meaning" of *The Dry Salvages* a priori would be at least overconfidence: so one might insist; with what chance, amid so much undiscriminating praise, of being understood? The later poetry of Eliot, that is, is thought to offer an ethical example: which is, after all, not very different from a "message" except that it is vague enough to suit the most up-to-date notions of the poetical. Here again, with perhaps one eye on his own expositors, Eliot displays his customary acuteness:

> . . . I am concerned further with criticism as evidence of the conception of the use of poetry in the critic's time, and assert that in order to compare the work of different critics we must investigate their assumptions as to what poetry does and ought to do. Examination of the criticism of our time leads me to believe that we are still in the Arnold period. (*The Use of Poetry*, p. 129)

[2] I do not say that Dr. Leavis, in *New Bearings in English Poetry*, reads it as a search for faith, though his approach to Eliot has other inadequacies. He is at some points close to the weaker side of Arnold. But his refutation of Eliot's inferior critics, favorable and unfavorable, is so telling that the reader sympathetic to the present study, should regard him as an important ally, and should comprehend *Ash-Wednesday* in Dr. Leavis' way before trying to do any more.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

II

It is evident that the nature of Eliot's moral preoccupation has yet to be defined: perhaps "isolated" would be a better word. We may expect it to be most isolable in the later poems, where he has isolated it himself: Eliot is one of those poets—Joyce is another —whose development has been such as continually to reduce and reduce the possibilities of misunderstanding. There are fewer ways of misreading *Four Quartets* with some comfort than of misreading *Prufrock*: which means that the inadequate reader is going to find the *Quartets* much more "difficult" and uncongenial. The most spectacular instance of this policy of excluding the uncomprehending was the publication of the Ariel Poems: when a whole battalion of Eliot-worshippers suddenly realized that they had been bowing at the wrong shrine and made for the door. Yet Eliot's continuity remained unbroken; *Journey of the Magi* has obvious analogies with part V of *The Waste Land*, though it would embarrass most admirers of *The Waste Land* to notice what they were. Indeed, despite the importance Eliot obviously attaches to them (vide his recent Harvard recordings) very little has ever been said about the Ariel Poems; they are neither sufficiently skeptical for the skeptics nor sufficiently assured for the Christians. Yet to say, as is usually said, that in *A Song for Simeon* Eliot is searching for faith is to say that he has not written a poem. As a matter of fact, he is writing a careful counterpart to *Gerontion*.

> *My life is light, waiting for the death wind,*
> *Like a feather on the back of my hand.*
> *Dust in sunlight and memory in corners*
> *Wait for the wind that chills toward the dead land,*

is meant to be closely connected with the

> *. . . old man driven by the Trades*
> *To a sleepy corner*

who awaits the ultimate dissolution of the cleansing blast:

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

. . . Gull against the wind, in the windy straits
Of Belle Isle, or running on the Horn,
White feathers in the snow . . .

Yet it is manifestly the *difference* between the two poems that counts. Gerontion habitually clothes his dryness in sonorous rhetoric. What he has never done:

I was neither at the hot gates
Nor fought in the warm rain
Nor knee deep in the salt marsh, heaving a cutlass,
Bitten by flies, fought,

is more moving in its rocking rhythms and abrupt caesuras than Simeon's lifelong resilient achievement:

I have walked many years in this city,
Kept faith and fast, provided for the poor,
Have given and taken honour and ease.
There went never any rejected from my door.

Though Gerontion's old age is of a piece with the evasions of his young manhood, yet paradoxically, between

Bitten by flies, fought

and

My house is a decayed house . . .

what the changing pace of the verse insists on is an illusion of contrast: after such glory, what a shabby finish! This is a dramatic device for projecting a mode of glozing self-consciousness inappropriate to Simeon; for the *conceptual* contrast between Simeon's high deserts and the fate of his descendants is negated by a level transition from one theme to the other without even a stanza break:

There went never any rejected from my door.
Who shall remember my house, where shall live my children's children
When the time of sorrow is come?

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

They will take to the goat's path and the fox's home,
Fleeing from the foreign faces and the foreign swords.

—the actual contrast between the man and his fortune hidden, deprecated, not dramatized nor, as in *Gerontion,* trumped up. The technique of *Gerontion* involves a dramatization of the speaker's plight that constantly returns to itself

(Here I am, an old man in a dry month . . .

I an old man,
A dull head among windy spaces . . .

I have no ghosts,
An old man in a draughty house
Under a windy knob . . .

We have not reached conclusion, when I
Stiffen in a rented house . . .)

—in order to invest itself with new glamour from ostensibly contrasting heroic vistas. Eliot has explained the technique in an essay written a few months before *Gerontion*:

> The really fine rhetoric of Shakespeare occurs in situations where a character in the play *sees himself* in a dramatic light. . . . A speech in a play should never be intended to move us as it might conceivably move other characters in the play, for it is essential that we should preserve our position of spectators, and observe always from the outside though with complete understanding. . . . And in the rhetorical speeches from Shakespeare which have been cited, we have this necessary advantage of a new clue to the character, in noting the angle from which he views himself. But when a character *in* a play makes a direct appeal to us, we are either the victim of our own sentiment, or we are in the presence of a vicious rhetoric.
>
> (*Rhetoric and Poetic Drama*)

One may conclude that many applauders of Gerontion's refined despair have been victims of their own sentiment; that Gerontion is constantly regarding himself in a dramatic light (like Othello); and that the point to be grasped about Simeon is that he is not regarding himself at all. His

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Not for me the martyrdom, the ecstasy of thought and prayer,
Not for me the ultimate vision

is instantly retrieved from self-pity by the calmly juxtaposed

Grant me thy peace.

In the same way, one of the most stirring moments in *Gerontion*,

Signs are taken for wonders. 'We would see a sign!'
The word within a word, unable to speak a word,
Swaddled with darkness. In the juvescence of the year
Came Christ the tiger

is in *A Song for Simeon* emptied of its paradoxical intensity to be the vehicle for poignancy of a wholly different kind:

Now at this birth season of decease,
Let the Infant, the still unspeaking and unspoken Word,
Grant Israel's consolation
To one who has eighty years and no tomorrow.

The lithe tiger in the darkness has no place in Simeon's glamourless calm.

The elaborately-textured contrasts of *Gerontion*, then, are manipulated according to a rhetorical decorum which Eliot explicitly connects with the moral state of the protagonist. In *A Song for Simeon*, rhythm is used to enact the failure of rhythm, and dramatic devices to convey the absence of drama. This is not to say that *Simeon* is a poem that works by the absence of poetry, that it secures its effects merely by having *Gerontion* available for contrast. The two opening lines should be enough to convince anyone of its power; though, as Eliot has remarked of readers of Dante, "It is apparently easier to accept damnation as poetic material than purgation or beatitude; less is involved that is strange to the modern mind." Simeon inhabits a positive spiritual state, whose tension, because not within himself but between himself and an order outside himself, is purer and more taut than Gerontion's stirring self-contemplation. Gerontion's hopeless attempt to unite his will instant by instant with that of

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

the tiger ("I would meet you upon this, honestly") dramatizes a conflict between the mind that suffers and the will that thinks; a conflict offered in the opening lines by the juxtaposition of the obedient, reading boy and the dry month. *Simeon* focuses a state: *Gerontion* a parody of that state. It is consciously ironical that the epigraph to *Gerontion* leads us to the Duke's speech in *Measure for Measure* III-1, which opens with words that might stand as epigraph for *Simeon*: "Be absolute for death."

Simeon the state: *Gerontion* the parody. That is its mode. The sacramental Tiger is eaten, divided, drunk among whispers of social and financial intrigue that parody the hushed voices of Churchgoers. Mr. Silvero walks all night like one examining his conscience. Hakagawa " bowing among the Titians" is a priest genuflecting at the profane altars of social decorum. The candles shifted in the dark room recall those of the altar; Fraulein von Kulp "who turned in the hall, one hand on the door," climaxes the series with an epiphany of guilty terror that throws over the preceding eight lines the lurid malaise of some cosmopolitan Black Mass. And the next words, "Vacant shuttles weave the wind," allude to Stephen Dedalus' meditation, in the first chapter of *Ulysses,* on Mulligan the parody-priest:

> Words Mulligan had spoken a moment since in mockery to the stranger. Idle mockery. The void awaits surely all them that weave the wind: a menace, a disarming and a worsting from those embattled angels of the church. (*Ulysses*, p. 22)

The void awaits them:

> *De Bailhache, Fresca, Mrs. Cammel, whirled*
> *Beyond the circuit of the shuddering Bear*
> *In fractured atoms.*

Gerontion and *A Song for Simeon* explore two modes of negative being: the first annihilation, the second self-surrender. And annihilation closely resembles self-surrender. Only an accession of self-consciousness is needed to turn the latter into the former. Annihilation is a parody of self-surrender.

"Parody" may be thought a strong term. It is justified, at any

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

rate, in *Prufrock,* where, even so early, the theme is fundamental. Prufrock as a John the Baptist who has been executed without having denounced the adultery of his hostess; a Lazarus who fears to return from the dead lest he be misunderstood; a Falstaff who resembles the fat knight only in being a butt and growing old; a Hamlet who is all soliloquies and no heroism, fustily annihilated like Polonius—Prufrock is in every way a caricature of his exemplars, who were "absolute for death."

> *Should I, after tea and cakes and ices,*
> *Have the strength to force the moment to its crisis?*
> *But though I have wept and fasted, wept and prayed,*
> *Though I have seen my head (grown slightly bald)*
> *brought in upon a platter,*
> *I am no prophet—and here's no great matter;*
> *I have seen the moment of my greatness flicker,*
> *And I have seen the eternal Footman hold my coat, and snicker,*
> *And in short, I was afraid.*

The knife-edge between annihilation and self-surrender is the dramatic theme of *Murder in the Cathedral.* Before his first entrance Thomas is described by a suspicious priest in terms suggesting that he habitually sees himself in a dramatic light:

> *I fear for the Archbishop, I fear for the Church,*
> *I know that the pride bred of sudden prosperity*
> *Was but confirmed by bitter adversity.*
> *I saw him as Chancellor, flattered by the King,*
> *Liked or feared by courtiers, in their overbearing fashion,*
> *Despised and despising, always isolated,*
> *Never one among them, always insecure;*
> *His pride always feeding upon his own virtues,*
> *Pride drawing sustenance from impartiality,*
> *Pride drawing sustenance from generosity,*
> *Loathing power given by temporal devolution,*
> *Wishing subjection to God alone.*

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The last two lines might describe a saint; in the context they delimit a vice, the vice whose attractiveness the Fourth Tempter is to exploit. The Fourth Tempter tempts Thomas with an accurate prediction of a glory to be attained through death: and the most damning temptation of all is to seek for what must certainly come,[3] as Gerontion seeks annihilation:

TEMPTER

Seek the way of martyrdom, make yourself the lowest
On earth, to be high in heaven.
And see far below you, where the gulf is fixed,
Your persecutors, in timeless torment,
Parched passion, beyond expiation.

THOMAS

No!
Who are you, tempting me with my own desires? . . .
Others offered real goods, worthless
But real. You only offer
Dreams to damnation.

TEMPTER

You have often dreamt them.

THOMAS

Is there no way, in my soul's sickness,
Does not lead to damnation in pride?
I well know that these temptations
Mean present vanity and future torment.
Can sinful pride be driven out
Only by more sinful? Can I neither act nor suffer
Without perdition?

[3] Compare the persistence of the Fortune-teller theme: *Waste Land* 43-59, *Sweeney Agonistes* 64-120, *The Dry Salvages* 188-204.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

It will not be disputed that Thomas is being tempted with a parody of self-surrender, which but the thinness of a knife-edge divides from sanctity. This same knife-edge between Thomas damned and Thomas saved, between Gerontion and Simeon, constitutes the ambivalence of the Death by Water motif in *The Waste Land*. Drowning in the life-giving waters is a parody of salvation through the death of the old Adam. The ambivalence is most pointed in the vision of the hyacinth girl in Part I: her hyacinths, which reappear in the first line of *A Song for Simeon*, contain both spring and death.

> *—Yet when we came back, late, from the Hyacinth garden,*
> *Your arms full, and your hair wet, I could not*
> *Speak, and my eyes failed, I was neither*
> *Living nor dead, and I knew nothing,*
> *Looking into the heart of light, the silence.*

Here the mode of parody is explicit. The girl is (like *La Figlia che Piange* [4]) a travesty of the figure whom the protagonist of *Ash-Wednesday* encounters at the top of the stairs:

> *Who walked between the violet and the violet,*
> *Who walked between*
> *The various ranks of varied green*
> *Going in white and blue, in Mary's colour,*
> *Talking of trivial things.*

And gaping in a trance of love, like Tannhauser, like Tristram, (*"Oed' und leer das Meer"*) her sweetheart enacts a travesty of one transfixed by the Beatific Vision. (When Dante gaped in the same way, Beatrice told him, "You make yourself sick with false

[4] Cf: *"Stand on the highest pavement of the stair—*
Lean on a garden urn—
Weave, weave the sunlight in your hair—
Clasp your flowers to you with a pained surprise—
Fling them to the ground and turn
With a fugitive resentment in your eyes:
But weave, weave the sunlight in your hair."
The comment of the Prufrockian stage-manager-narrator is in explicit contrast to the modes of *Ash-Wednesday*: "I should have lost a gesture and a pose."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

fancy.") As the epigraph to *Sweeney Agonistes* reminds us patly, "Hence the soul cannot be possessed of the divine union, until it has divested itself of the love of created beings."

III

From the survey of these instances (and many more might be added) there emerges a pattern, a principle of organization, which may be put in this way. The spiritual states with which the poetry is concerned are each conceived dynamically, not as a stasis but as a tension: as a stasis comprehending a tension: as a tug of antitheses. Each such state is dramatically defined in terms of the antitheses it includes: birth and death, redemption and drowning, light and darkness, rest and movement. These antitheses are both poetic symbols and moral modes.

Secondly, for the resolution of these opposites there is generally a comprehensive symbol. Thus the event witnessed by the Magi comprehends Birth and Death; the water in *The Waste Land* brings life and death together, as do Simeon's hyacinths; Christ the Tiger combines the lithe grace of Blake's Tyger, proper to fighting in the warm rains, and destruction proper to de Bailhache, Fresca, and Mrs. Cammel. *A Song for Simeon* implies the Christ-child as such a symbol in its initial situation; to Simeon, who has been promised that he shall not die until he has seen the Savior, the Child represents rebirth and death at once.

Thirdly, this reconciling symbol is ambivalent in two ways. It is ambivalent in terms of the opposites it reconciles; it is also ambivalent in terms of its meaning for the protagonist. It invites two closely similar attitudes, one of which we have called a parody of the other. *Murder in the Cathedral* is a full-dress demonstration: the moral dialectic *is* the plot. The initial antitheses may be roughly specified as death and glory. The symbol that unites them is assassination. And for Thomas two attitudes to assassination are possible: one of which, seeking it, will damn him as a kind of suicide; the other, refraining from flight, will save him as a Martyr of the Church. But seeking martyrdom and not avoiding it are almost indistinguishable modes: indistinguish-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

able in their consequent actions: but sharply in contrast in that inner citadel where under the inspection of God alone the protagonist's will is directed forward or backward. It is the backward direction of the will, marked by its constituent self-consciousness which in turn is manifested by rhetoric employed within the poem, that is the parody of the forward.

"In a world of fugitives," remarks Agatha drily near the climax of *The Family Reunion*, "the person taking the opposite direction will appear to be running away."

"Under the inspection of God alone. . . " The moral world, the world in which the will achieves its upward or downward direction, is inaccessible to the senses, and so to direct poetic treatment. The still point around which the poetry of Eliot revolves is the point at which theology and poetry meet. Theology and poetry, as St. Thomas Aquinas remarks, are curiously alike in their reliance upon metaphor: for the opposite reasons that the latter deals in materials too much immersed in matter for immediate apprehension (such as the human will), the former in objects too much transcending material realization (such as the Trinity).[5] It is only by the employment of such a dialectic of analogies as the one outlined above that either can yield intelligible knowledge. But there are few poetic examples of the procedure employed so directly or so skillfully. And it is by taking advantage of the point at which his procedures intersect those of the theologian that Eliot can fuse psychology and theology, the lower and upper worlds, as he does in, for example, *Little Gidding*. Through the manipulation of parody-reconcilations of varying degrees of imperfection, an illusion, a speculum, of the inapprehensible transcendent reconciliation, the "still point," is forged for contemplation.

IV

It must be emphasized again that this moral dialectic is not a doctrine but a principle of organization for poetry. It is something used, not something taught. The only purpose in formu-

[5] Father Walter J. Ong's "Wit and Mystery," in *Speculum* for July 1947, from which this observation is taken, is relevant to Eliot's techniques at every point.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

lating it is to gain new precision in apprehending and discussing Mr. Eliot's poetic objectives, a function which it will only serve when used as a tool for particular analysis. The poetry, one must not forget, works concretely and dramatically, in the dramatic confrontation of images and states which are themselves concretely "there." It will be useful to show this by considering *Ash-Wednesday* in some detail: a poem generally considered at least charming, but remarkably resistant to useful analysis. But it is in *Four Quartets* that the principles isolated above are most useful to the critic, since Eliot there uses precisely and explicitly the modes of organization described at the end of the previous section through a long and complex poem full of subtle moral antitheses. One or two examples from the *Quartets* may therefore usefully be considered first.

> *There are three conditions which often look alike*
> *Yet differ completely, flourish in the same hedgerow:*
> *Attachment to self and to things and to persons,*
> *detachment*
> *From self and from things and from persons; and, growing between them, indifference,*
> *Which resembles the others as death resembles life,*
> *Being between two lives—unflowering, between*
> *The live and the dead nettle.*
>
> (*Little Gidding III*)

The paradoxes here are more subtle than they first appear; what saves them from undifferentiated over-subtlety is the concrete image introduced in the second line and picked up in the sixth and seventh. In controlling the way in which a set of abstractions is apprehended, in furnishing the paradigm of nettles live, dead, and unflowering, it points to the requisite differentiations. Yet the emphasis is on "unflowering": the spurious resolution of attachment and detachment: indifference. "*Growing* between them" has just enough active force to enact the thrusting, crowding interjection of the stifling weed. (It is worth remarking that the realization of images only so much as is needful is a major

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

rhetorical device through the *Quartets.*) In the fifth line the antithesis between the weed and the other two is sharpened into a death-and-life relationship; and this new antithesis is developed in the next line ("betwen two lives, unflowering") so that when the dead nettle is mentioned a line later, its deadness becomes, in contradistinction to the "unflowering," only a special case of life. "Dead" in line seven has acquired the special concrete force of something that, like Simeon, has lived its part, differentiated from the Prufrock deadness of what has never been alive; the former corresponds in the original triad to "detachment," which is thus invested in retrospect with a positive sense for which uninspected usage gives little warrant. It is plain that we are in the presence of a moral triangle of the kind we have met before, when life and death were resolved by the annihilation of the old man who

> *. . . was neither at the hot gates*
> *Nor fought in the warm rain.*

Life, death, and annihilation; attachment, detachment, and indifference; the live nettle, the dead nettle, and the weed. The reader need not equate these sets to see how they resemble one another in structure.

Yet as always the parody-reconciliation prepares for the actual; the triad becomes a tetrad: a quartet. The other mode of resolving these opposites is indicated a few lines later: love. Love is put into the dialectical context by the phrase in which it is introduced, where "desire" picks up the "attachment" of the opening:

> *. . . the expansion*
> *Of love beyond desire.*

Love expanded beyond desire (there is no need to differentiate it from "detachment") reconciles these opposites in a way that the rest of the passage goes on to explore—

> *. . . Thus, love of a country*
> *Begins as attachment to our own field of action*

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

And comes to find that action of little importance
Though never indifferent.

—and in a way that sparkles, as a new lightness of rhythm shows, with implicit contrast to the resolution achieved by "indifference."

In this way the conceptual is embodied in the concrete without losing its wide range of reference; and a pattern of concepts is given dramatic life that is richly felt without ceasing to be diagrammatic. It is in fact the persistence of this diagram in the mind, and the interrelationship of the nettles in the hedgerow, that gives body to the climactic line with its key-word "pattern":

See, now they vanish,
The faces and places, with the self which, as it could,
loved them,
To become renewed, transfigured, in another pattern.

Now this diagramming organizes the dramatic interaction of moral principles in a way both conceptual and concrete; rather as if the interaction of Hamlet and Fortinbras were deprived of the complications of "character" without loss of definition. The example is not fortuitous, since *Hamlet* marks Shakespeare's first decisive transfer of the dramatic conflict from character and situation to language; and Eliot's later poetry has many points of contact with the corresponding contemporary shift in critical interest from Shakespeare's characters to the organization of his verse, a shift that Eliot in *Four Elizabethan Dramatists* and elsewhere did much to initiate.

The third part of *Burnt Norton* offers a still more elaborate and explicit example of a mode of organization that Eliot has in one way or another employed since the *Prufrock* days. The "place of disaffection" with its characteristic "flicker" is explicitly differentiated from uniform light and darkness:

. . . In a dim light: neither daylight
Investing form with lucid stillness
Turning shadow into transient beauty

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

With slow rotation suggesting permanence
Nor darkness to purify the soul
Emptying the sensual with deprivation
Cleansing affection from the temporal.
Neither plenitude nor vacancy. Only a flicker
Over the strained time-ridden faces. . . .

The darkness follows the daylight with a gentle inevitability enforced by the half-suggested metaphor of the revolving world in space (introduced by the ambiguous "turning," furthered by "slow rotation," and reinforced by the way "suggesting permanence" picks up "the still point of the turning world" from the previous section). And this familiar darkness, with its cleansing and purifying attributes, under the beneficent sign of the "turning world," gives paradoxical positive force to the "vacancy" that is ostensibly contrasted with "plenitude." (Cf. the treatment of "the live and the dead nettle" in the passage previously discussed; the two extracts—the former is from the corresponding section of *Little Gidding*—are explicit parallels within the organization of the *Quartets* as a whole.) The "flicker" combines plenitude and vacancy, light and darkness, in a barrenly mechanical way: its context is that of the Underground train, in contrast with the "slow rotation" of the "turning world" outside. And the spatial diagram once established, it contributes, as with the nettles, to the dramatic localization of the fourth term of the moral tetrad—the darkness which is still further from merely natural darkness than is the eternal half-light of the Tube, and which is hence introduced by a spatial gesture:

Descend lower, descend only
Into the world of perpetual solitude,
World not world, but that which is not world.

The odd concreteness of that final phrase has affinities with the purifying "vacancy" of thirteen lines before, just as "love" has affinities with the "live nettle" and the equivalent "still point" with the daylit "plenitude"; but the affinity is not identity: the carefully-sketched conceptual structure cooperates with rhythmic

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

and other devices to establish the identity of "that which is not world" as a *quartum quid*. Only in this way, by a diagramming of its relationships with the apprehensible worlds of daylight, darkness, and the Tube, could the intrinsically transcendental be projected in such startling concreteness. It is described always positively, yet always, with circumlocutory tact, in terms of what it is not. The light and darkness with which it has affinities are the opposites it reconciles, as the still point reconciles rest and motion (cf. *East Coker* 131: "So the darkness shall be the light, and the stillness the dancing"); the Hollow-men world of the restless movement and the "flicker" is the parody-reconciliation. It is significant, perhaps, that the dominating natural force of the latter is Gerontion's wind.

Commentary on the *Quartets* is a delicate business, and it has been perhaps tactful to restrict illustration of a diagrammatic principle to sections where Eliot's spatial metaphors themselves imply diagrams. Diagrams, it must be insisted, is what they do imply, in the passages examined. The metaphors are never permitted to emerge with sufficient fullness to insist on the accidentals of their concrete life. Whatever the tactical difficulties of the commentator may be, however, it is not impossible to show at least that the moral dialectic underlies the organization of the *Quartets* from first to last; the relation of the opening sections of *Burnt Norton* and *Little Gidding,* for example, is analogous to that of *Gerontion* and *A Song for Simeon.* The desiccation of

> *Time present and time past*
> *Are both perhaps present in time future,*
> *And time future contained in time past,*

with its "world of speculation" and its "passage that we did not take" (cf. Gerontion's "contrived corridors" of history) contrasts sharply with the confident concreteness of

> *Midwinter spring is its own season*
> *Sempiternal though sodden towards sundown,*
> *Suspended in time, between pole and tropic.*

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

More important, antitheses balanced on caesuras are the mode of the central passage in both sections; but the reconciliation of opposites so triumphantly enacted in *Little Gidding* is in *Burnt Norton* hallucinatory, tentative, and transitory.

> *There they were, dignified, invisible,*
> *Moving without pressure, over the dead leaves,*
> *In the autumn heat, through the vibrant air*

is "suspended in time" in the same way as the "Midwinter spring" passage. But "invisible" oddly cancels, while it enhances, "dignified"; the pressureless motion over the dead leaves implies absence, not presence; and the air, with its rich qualifier "vibrant," is more sensibly *there* than anything else in the passage. Rhythmically too the contrasts are enforced.

> *Moving without pressure, over the dead leaves,*

upsets with its elided syllables the march of the basic four-stress line so as to make the caesura a point not of balance but of hesitation; "Time present and time past" has by contrast rhythmical confidence, though it is a Gerontion's contrast in abstractions. In *Little Gidding* the rugged beat and insistent alliteration contribute to a contrary, positive effect:

> *Sempiternal, though sodden towards sundown,*
> *Suspended in time, between pole and tropic.*

V

No more can be said about the *Quartets* without minutely considering a far larger body of evidence and tracing, in a way that baffles written analysis of commensurate length, an organization of unexampled intricacy. It has been, however, worth while to be able to point to the moral dialectic in at once its most elaborate and most unequivocal form. *Ash-Wednesday* is charier of systematic elaboration; but once the principles of the dialectic have

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

been grasped, the analysis of that firm but delicately complex work may be undertaken with some confidence (which is not to say—need it be insisted?—that *Ash-Wednesday* depends on outside elucidation; rather that some grasp of the principles involved assists one to show how something so superficially tenuous works with such speed and precision).

It is profitable to begin by juxtaposing the first and last parts: meant to be formally contrasted, as the opening echoes insist. The contrast may be helpfully localized in this way: the total gain of the progression through the poem from the monumental opening of Section I,

> *Because I do not hope to turn again*
> *Because I do not hope*
> *Because I do not hope to turn,*

is indicated by the changing of "Because" into "Although." It is a serious falsification to call this an achievement of faith. What is achieved is tension:

> *Wavering between the profit and the loss*
> *In this brief transit where the dreams cross*
> *The dreamcrossed twilight between birth and dying*
> *(Bless me father) though I do not wish to wish these things*
> *From the white window towards the granite shore*
> *The white sails still fly seaward, seaward flying*
> *Unbroken wings*

The contrast of the "unbroken wings" with the celebrated lines in Part I:

> *I no longer strive to strive towards such things*
> *(Why should the agéd eagle stretch its wings?)*
> *Why should I mourn*
> *The vanished power of the usual reign?*

is a contrast between final tension and initial troubled inertia. The progression of the poem is from ratiocinative submission ("Because I know" . . . "Consequently I rejoice . . .") to a tension

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

among concretions ("And the weak spirit quickens to rebel/For the bent golden-rod and the lost sea smell") that has no use for "because" and "consequently." What is achieved is superior wakefulness.

The paradoxical terms of the tension deserve examination.

> *And the lost heart stiffens and rejoices*
> *In the lost lilac and the lost sea voices*
> *And the weak spirit quickens to rebel*
> *For the bent golden-rod and the lost sea smell*
> *Quickens to recover*
> *The cry of quail and the whirling plover*
> *And the blind eye creates*
> *The empty forms between the ivory gates*
> *And smell renews the salt savour of the sandy earth.*

The tension—the ambivalence in the achieved attitude—is located in every noun, verb, and adjective in this passage. The heart is "lost" to the world and lost in the world. It "stiffens" with life and with rebellion.[6] The lilac is "lost" in belonging to the world that has been renounced; but an overtone generated by the emphatic "rejoices" implies that in the new world lilacs and sea voices somehow appear transfigured: an overtone, however, whose thinness contributes to a painful uncertainty that finds its expression in "weak spirit" a few words later. The senses, by the same implication of transfiguration and recovery, renew "the salt savour of the sandy earth"; but the parallel with the antecedent delusions created by the "blind eye" and the doubtful force of "sandy" (Is it really fruitful earth? What are its relations with "the desert in the garden" of Part V and with the desert of "the blessing of sand" in Part II?) increase the tension of implicit delusion.

Yet the positive note on which the sequence closes remains to be stressed.

[6] "The bent golden-rod" of course is in one sense phallic: hence the ambivalence of "quickens" and the special force of "rebel."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Suffer us not to mock ourselves with falsehood
Teach us to care and not to care
Teach us to sit still
And even among these rocks,
Our place in His will
And even among these rocks
Sister, mother
And spirit of the river, spirit of the sea,
Suffer me not to be separated

And let my cry come unto Thee.

"Teach us to care and not to care." The tension itself is a good. This line and the following have not the context of resignation that sponsored their first appearance in Part I. Or rather, the resignation is of greater purity. The ambivalent "separated" rejects internal separation as well as separation from God. The opposite pull of the senses and the devotional spirit—of God's creation and God—is to be maintained as a fruitful and essential equivocalness, not "solved" by relegating one half of the being to earth and the other half to heaven. It is a temptation to deny the senses that has to be resisted, rather as Becket contended with the temptation to appoint himself martyr.

It is essential in perceiving the organization of the poem to focus the mood of Section I accurately. It needs to be insisted that there is something oddly self-conscious about the initial talk of resignation. Failure to see that this is essential and intentional has caused the line about the aged eagle to stick in many critical craws. Though the mood and direction of the whole poem are notably different, the moral condition of the protagonist in Section I is not, in terms of the moral dialectic, strikingly different from that of Gerontion. The resolution of opposites mocks that of the final section; the loss of "The infirm glory of the positive hour" insists that the glory was only pragmatically infirm, and the hour remains a nostalgic positive.

Because I know that time is always time
And place is always and only place

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

And what is actual is actual only for one time
And only for one place
I rejoice that things are as they are and
I renounce the blesséd face
And renounce the voice
Because I cannot hope to turn again.

This is dangerously close to acknowledging that belief involves seizing a particular and now irretrievable moment; its ingenuousness, in the mode of

I that was near your heart was removed therefrom . . .
I have lost my sight, smell, hearing, taste, and touch:
How should I use them for your closer contact?

–is explicitly "placed" as a mode of dishonesty in Section V:

The right time and the right place are not here
No place of grace for those who avoid the face
No time to rejoice for those who walk among noise and deny the voice.

It is the discovery that this initial renunciation has been in fact a denial and an avoidance that prepares the purified tension of the concluding section.

Because I cannot hope to turn again
Consequently I rejoice, having to construct something
Upon which to rejoice

—always the stress is on the constructing ego: ingenuous again in the mode of *Gerontion*

Think at last
I have not made this show purposelessly . . .
I would meet you upon this honestly,

and in contrast with Section VI

The blind eye creates
The empty forms between the ivory gates—

Virgil's gates, it will be remembered, of false dreams. It is—of

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

all people—Sweeney who among the nightingales guards the gates of horn.

The impeccable formalism with which the oaken variations of the opening are ordered, rather as though a speech were being tried over in different ways, introduces the note of culpable self-consciousness at once; the Shakespearean reminiscence in line 4 continues it; it is clinched in

(Why should the agéd eagle stretch its wings?)

where there is a functional dandyism (cf. Prufrock's "Do I dare? and Do I dare?") in the very parentheses.

To place the emphasis thus, however, is to risk insisting too much on the elements analogous to caricature; the real and tragic barrenness that co-exists here with quasi-Prufrockian modes is quickly modulated into a resolute direction of the will, a gathering of purposes

And pray that I may forget
These matters that with myself I too much discuss
Too much explain

and a resolute repetition of formulae

Pray for us sinners now and at the hour of our death
Pray for us now and at the hour of our death

that make possible the subsequent knowledge, and indicate, as in the opening of *Burnt Norton*, at least a conceptual knowledge of the categories that the process of redemption will fill with experiential, even tragically experiential, content.

The techniques of self-dramatization outlined in *Rhetoric and Poetic Drama* are used in Section I of *Ash-Wednesday* with a sort of conspicuous subtlety. It is plain, however, that the action of the poem is from one pole to the other of the moral dialectic, from a sterile to a potentially fertile union of opposite tendencies, from the presumptive "Because" to the poignant "Although." For the purposes of the present essay the intermediate action may be very rapidly indicated. The vision of Section II transforms

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

conceptual into experiential dryness; the bones, the desert, the "burden of the grasshopper," define an initial equilibrium of which Section III is a dramatic troubling. The dismembered flesh asserts itself poignantly:

The broadbacked figure drest in blue and green
Enchanted the maytime with an antique flute.
Blown hair is sweet, brown hair over the mouth blown,
Lilac and brown hair;
Distraction, music of the flute, stops and steps of
the mind over the third stair,
Fading, fading . . .

the very existence of temptation is from the point of view of Section I a gain. And in Section IV the lady reappears in the temptation's colors and its modes: for temptation is a parody of the beatific tension:

Who walked between the violet and the violet
Who walked between
The various ranks of varied green . . .
Who moved among the others as they walked,
Who then made strong the fountains and made fresh
the springs.

The times and places in which the protagonist at the beginning of the poem had regretfully lost interest (Cf. "If all time is eternally present/All time is unredeemable") are restored in a genuine timeless moment [7]:

The new years walk, restoring
Through a bright cloud of tears, the years, restoring
With a new verse the ancient rhyme. Redeem
The time. Redeem
The unread vision in the higher dream . . .

[7] With which compare, from *The Dry Salvages*,
We had the experience but missed the meaning,
And approach to the meaning restores the experience
In a different form, beyond any meaning
We can assign to happiness.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

and the tension generated by their restoration initiates the plunge into the maelstrom of Section V, out of which the conclusion of the poem is drawn. The articulate tension is differentiated from the unspoken troublings of the first section; from the helpless

> *. . . children at the gate*
> *Who will not go away and cannot pray.*

VI

It has been commonplace ever since it appeared to point to *Ash-Wednesday* as a turning-point in Eliot's canon. The assumption behind this sort of remark has been that the new language and the new spiritual preoccupations constitute a foreswearing and an undoing of all that he had hitherto done. There was an early Eliot and a later Eliot, between whom, for accidental or doctrinal reasons, the reader was to choose.

At the beginning of the present essay it was suggested, on the contrary, that *Ash-Wednesday* was a turning-point rather in the way that the third act of *Hamlet* is a turning-point. The Eliot corpus represents a single and coherent dramatic action, whose protagonist, as Eliot took constant pains to assure his readers thirty years ago in the celebrated essays on Impersonality, is *not* Mr. Eliot, but a *persona* of Mr. Eliot's. The action consists of the metamorphoses of the *persona*. Whether these metamorphoses bore an analogical resemblance to the increasing integration of Mr. Eliot's own experience is not the business of the critic or the reader.

These successive metamorphoses—Prufrock, Tiresias, and the Tiresias with a theological dimension who is the speaker from *Ash-Wednesday* through *Little Gidding*—correspond to successively deeper and deeper penetration of the world of psychological *données*: a preoccupation that deepens but never shifts. What is contemplated throughout is the only world accessible to contemplation: what we have called the world of parody-reconciliations. They are apprehended at the outset by the unbuttressed aesthetic

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

sensibility; a sensibility into which moral and metaphysical antennae are, by a process that is constantly at the center of the drama, progressively incorporated. What is dwelt on at first is the folly and ignobility of the parodies that walk this world. From *Gerontion* onward this folly is apprehended morally as well as aesthetically—the parodies fall tragically short of the redeemed world at which they seem to hint. And finally the enlightenment that sets in with *Ash-Wednesday* culminates in *Four Quartets* with the plenary realization that it is only through these varieties of imperfection that the perfect can be apprehended at all. The folly of the world; the tragedy of the world; the necessity of the world.

Sin is behovely but
All shall be well and
All manner of thing shall be well.

This final perception is indicated in Eliot's essay on Dante, where he remarks of the *Vita Nuova* (that account of a first love whose resemblance to a succession of Eliot situations, from *Dans le Restaurant* to *Family Reunion,* has not escaped the commentators) that this lower love is only intelligible in terms of the higher; but on the other hand the higher love is only knowable by way of the lower.

Seen in its place in a dramatic unfolding which resembles, as Ezra Pound remarked of the *Commedia* of Dante, "a cycle of mystery plays," it is not the thinness of *Ash-Wednesday* but its richness that baffles commentary; not the traditional familiarity of its themes, but their equivocal strangeness. The main difficulty of one who would read it properly is to be sufficiently tactful. Perhaps, then, there has been some point in outlining a structural principal, informing the images and moral themes and outlining the poet's constant preoccupations, in terms of which poems like *Ash-Wednesday* and *Four Quartets* may be discussed with less danger of misunderstanding than hitherto. The moral dialectic that defines every state in terms of a pair of opposites, that stresses contrasting means of dealing with identical tensions, and that

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

underlies poetry in which every symbol invites not only ambivalent concepts but differently ambivalent attitudes, can explain at least why the commentator cannot work in terms of equation and tabulation, and help him reason with those who imagine that this fact reflects adversely on the poems. But perhaps, now that the Zeitgeist is disposing of the Philistines, it is rather from his doctrinal admirers that Mr. Eliot's reputation needs to be saved. To bring his essential ambivalences sharply to their attention may make such glad assenters less complacent.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Two Poems

EDGAR BOWERS

PALM SUNDAY

Obliquely underneath a distant cloud
That moves away, imponderable and slow,
The sunlight casts green shadow on the hill
Where grass is bright with rain, beneath a row
Of faintly silver plum smudging the air.
I dream that some might go there to collect
The yellow, blue, and white, the many hued,
To deck the chiseled cross, above the hill,
Of Him Whom life destroyed and death renewed.

They move almost too small for naked eye
Along soft banks, and underneath the shrine
They fashion ropes of acacia, hyacinth,
Jonquil, narcissus, quince, and jessamine,
And wreaths of lilies gleaming with the wet.
And approach together now the one bare tree
Which bears more certain, better, and more sweet
Than those the blooms they loop about the arms,
The sagging head of Christ, and the cramped feet.

The swallows wheel serenely calm and sure
About the Head wild asters ornament
And flash their reddening wings in amber light
Which darkens where they fly and, slowly spent,
Will leave the hill in darkness to desire
Except where spirit-like the silver trees
Surround the hidden cross with flaming bloom
Against the season, senses, and the hour
When they, like all the rest, dissolve in gloom.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Yet still I strain to catch a sudden glint
Reflected by the cross from lights that pass
Precisely in their going on the road,
Or from a star, or the empyreal mass
That wheels the dome of night from pole to pole,
Or from the frenzied pit of Death itself,
Or from the frame of Time, where fire and ice
Ignite and freeze together in the Will
That makes and unmakes Thee, O my sweet Christ!

THE VIRGIN CONSIDERED AS A PICTURE

Her unawed face, whose pose so long assumed
Is touched with what reality we feel,
Bends to itself and, to itself resumed,
Restores a tender fiction to the real.

And in her artful posture movement lies
Whose timeless motion flesh must so conceal;
Yet what her pose conceals we might surmise
And might pretend to gather from her eyes

The final motion flesh gives up to art.
But slowly, if we watch her long enough,
The nerves grow subtler, and she moves apart

Into a space too dim with time and blood
For our set eyes to follow true enough,
Or nerves to guess about her, if they would.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

CHRONICLES

Bloomsbury and the Academies

B. RAJAN

THE LITERARY SITUATION IN ENGLAND

ONE WAY OF ASSESSING THE DEFICIENCIES of university culture is to look through the catalogue of a university library. The Cambridge periodicals section is a dejecting parade of omissions. It has no file of *The Southern Review* or *Symposium* and only two gift copies of *The Hound and Horn*. Its subscription lists do not mention *The Hudson Review*, *The Sewanee Review*, *Poetry*, *Partisan Review* or *Accent;* and *The Kenyon Review* which was put up for subscription as a test case was in due course turned down by the library committee. The books section is hardly more encouraging. There is no criticism by either Brooks or Blackmur, nothing by Gregory, Kenneth Burke or Winters and only three books of criticism to represent Ransom and Tate. Though the lists of English publications are much fuller one feels that this is only because the library under act of Parliament is entitled to free copies.

These facts would not matter so much if they were the consequence of something like local prejudice. They are gruesome because they happen to be typical. Walk out of the library into the university lecture rooms and you will find no course on modern literature listed. In fact there has been only one such course during the thirty-odd years of the history of the English Tripos. That was in 1947 and the experiment, though well attended and well thought of by students, was apparently found too shocking to be repeated. Walk out of Cambridge into any university in England and you will only find the same situation recurring. The universities take no interest in contemporary literature and the natural concern of students with the subject remains at the stage of indiscriminate enthusiasm, an enthusiasm neither matured nor formulated by responsible apprenticeship to a critical tradition.

This dissociation of the universities from contemporary writing is one of the most important facts about literature in England. Inevitably it leads to two effects; the critical context becomes devitalized through its irrelevance to the living present and literature itself is mutilated by its lack of relation to an inherited past. In universities, this collapse of standards has by now assumed several respectable masquerades. We have "pure" scholarship, fact-finding for its own sake, based on a false analogy with the pure and applied

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

sciences. We have academic eclecticism, the invitation to consider various "points of view" all of which have "something to be said for them" and which are academically more or less equal. "Narrowness" and "Puritan intolerance" are the pitfalls these critics seek to avoid; faced with the discrimination required by critical standards they reply by appealing to the Whirligig of Taste. Another way of escaping from criticism is to deny that you can criticize that which is living and growing. Even more fashionable is the doubt whether criticism in the strict sense is worth-while. There can be no criticism, only appreciation; and appreciation is aesthetic, not analytical. The only way to appreciate a poem is to try and write a relevant poem about it.

These malpractices, I realize, exist also in America; but in America they are at least confronted by a minority securely entrenched, equipped with its means for expression and on the whole reasonably convinced of its standards. In England the situation is quite different. The demise of *The Criterion* marked the end of a period all the more decisively because *The Criterion* did not stand alone. It was supported by an *Adelphi* far more potent than it is now, by *Purpose,* by a *Life and Letters* more interested in criticism than in its present issues under Robert Herring's leadership, and by auxiliary ventures such as the *Coliseum*. These magazines were not always vigorous or effective in their advocacy of standards; they yielded as often as not to the temptations of polite neutrality and unbalanced patronage. But at least they supplied an outlet for serious writing. Today that outlet has shrunk alarmingly. To represent it there is only *Scrutiny* with its impressive but isolated tradition and *Focus* and *Politics and Letters* trying under great difficulties to get themselves established. The latter has been forced by lack of finances into what one hopes is a temporary suspension. *Now,* an anarchist bi-monthly, offers facilities for serious writing but the different disciplines of social and literary criticism are not distinguished with sufficient clarity in its pages and the work in both fields suffers as a consequence. There is certainly no group in England to approach the New Criticism in influence and no magazine with the prestige of the intelligent American quarterlies.

The circulation prospects of these magazines, moreover, have been affected by what developed last summer into the book slump. In fact the book slump is no more than a reversion to the pre-1939 structure of demand. The war and its immediate aftermath pushed the demand for new writing to intoxicating heights so that anyone with access to paper and a printer could be fairly sure of selling out anything he published. Last year the market slumped spectacularly but the results, though distressing, are by no means catastrophic. *Scrutiny*, restricted to 1,000 copies by the paper shortage, could undoubtedly dispose of very many more copies. *Politics and Letters* has sold over 1500 and *Focus* sales have never been less than this number. To appreciate what these figures mean one should remember that *The Criterion's* circulation was on the wrong side

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

of 1000. Without financial or official support the survival of serious magazines must always be problematical. But if their development were not restricted by the paper shortage and interrupted by production delays they might, despite these difficulties, offer good criticism a medium and an audience. As things stand, however, there is little encouragement for vital evaluation and every inducement, aesthetic and academic, to turn one's attention to some less pugnacious activity.

This decline of criticism, as I have already suggested, is leading inexorably to the collapse of literature. Graham Greene's *The Heart of the Matter* is a fine exception to the prevailing mediocrity; but the very gratitude with which one greets it indicates vividly the state of writing in England. Apart from Greene's work, the public continues to wait anxiously for the appearance of even a second-rate poem or novel. They will not be written; for writing needs intelligence, and the elimination of intelligence from writing seems a fixed ambition of Bloomsbury's recent strategy. Perhaps some definition of Bloomsbury is called for. I think I can most usefully define it (with no reflection on the honesty of its citizens) as a culture determined by the absence of standards. Membership depends therefore on etiquette rather than principles; and an etiquette which, at one time, may have been meant to be literary has, not unnaturally, ended by becoming social. At its best this means that the credentials of quality are external: the right subject, the fashionable imagery, the respectably radical metric. But at its worst, and the worst is becoming increasingly frequent, the merits or demerits of a poem are confused with the trustworthiness or otherwise of its author. In a culture without standards loyalty to good manners, politeness to one's colleagues and collective defense against critical aggression are bound, in the end, to substitute for standards. Evaluation gives place to unconscious propaganda. Instead of those vital and seminal critical judgments whose potency springs from patient and searching analysis we are left with fine writing fashioned by good taste, an educated dilettantism with its emphasis on the readable.

One need hardly point out the disastrous effects upon writing when critical standards are debased into standardized attitudes. Plainly the temptation to prefabricate, to reornament accepted emotional exteriors, can only gain strength from this lack of a valuing context. There can be no other result than self-deception. The formula will be accepted as evidence of the experience, the gesture encouraged as a comment on reality. Stock dramatizations will be believed in uncritically. Sensitive intellectuals will monotonously inform us that each one of them is guilty of all evil. This, they will imagine, is personal responsibility, the indication of an active social conscience. An old woman sitting by the fire will claim that day follows night and spring succeeds the winter while the eternal feminine lies imprisoned in the underworld. Several young poets will discover that they are Lazarus. Others, when not emulating

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Mr. Eliot's *neither nor* will talk incoherently, but fashionably, about hanged gods and drowned sailors.

Formulae such as these are dangerous in themselves for the growing writer and the semi-critical reader. But their prestige and attractiveness are made almost unchallengeable by the propaganda resources which Bloomsbury manipulates. The influence of this group is seldom realized. They dominate the review section of our two best Sunday newspapers and control the literary side of three of our four most important weeklies. *The New Statesman,* with a circulation nearing 80,000, is their favorite and characteristic vehicle. Bloomsbury's periodical and occasional publications include *Penguin New Writing,* a quarterly with a circulation of over 50,000, *Horizon, Orion, The New Cornhill, Orpheus* (née *New Writing and Daylight*), and *Turnstile,* a New Statesman miscellany. *Polemic,* which was Bloomsbury's attempt to popularize logical positivism and semantics, ended, appropriately enough, with Spender ruminating in an aeroplane over Europe. As for publishing houses, Bloomsbury owns two and virtually controls the highbrow side of two others. In addition it dominates literary broadcasts and through them *The Listener* with its considerable circulation. It should be unnecessary to add that it exerts a powerful influence on Book Society policy and is more than well represented in cultural propaganda.

The most alarming fact about Bloomsbury's influence however, is the lack of a realistic opposition to it. One might have expected such an opposition from Geoffrey Grigson's *The Mint,* which proposed a union of criticism and scholarship. But the two worlds are juxtaposed, not integrated, and so all that *The Mint* eventually gave us was Work in Progress plus conventional pedantry. One might expect an opposition also from the *Cambridge Journal,* a new monthly with an imposing list of editors. But the most illuminating article the Journal has so far published is probably one on the 1948 Derby. As for the new generation of literary editors—typical names are Tambimuttu, Wrey Gardiner and Reginald Moore—they differ from their elders chiefly in details of taste and in a greater readiness to print unestablished authors. If they were to depose Messrs. Connolly and Lehmann a new set of names would be mentioned in publisher's lists and literary broadcasts but those names would camouflage the same tradition of failure, the same abdication from the requirements of intelligence, the same nervous evasion of what literature demands and implies. I hope I am not being unsympathetic to these editors or for that matter to Day Lewis, Connolly and Lehmann. Criticism is most difficult in an age of insecurity. When values are being destroyed one fears the right to examine; the clique becomes preferable to solitary honesty and evasion less threatening than the moral demands of defeat. There is about unscrutinized good taste a vague and consoling solidarity which appeals to one's instincts of literary tolerance and one's feeling that each man is compelled to see truth

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

in his own way. If criticism menaces these incitements of the coterie then, not surprisingly, criticism must go. What unites periodicals of the literary right and left is thus a common contempt for criticism or at least a common ignorance of the values which criticism implies. "These poems cannot be criticized. They can only be acclaimed," says Herbert Read significantly of Dylan Thomas' latest volume. Similarly Alex Comfort asserts that the best poems of Kenneth Patchen are very like a blow in their total effect and therefore "equally impossible to analyze." Tambimuttu's contempt for criticism is well known and vehement. Day Lewis begins his much admired Clark lectures as a poet ironically doubting his competence to criticize. Needless to say he is delighted when a poem of Rossetti's glides "like quicksilver" from one's touch and "offers no space for criticism to hatch its parasitic theories." Such assaults upon criticism are characteristic and frequent; their converse, as one would expect, is an indiscriminate and confusing homage in which poses of reverential approval are struck before accomplished minor poets and distinctions disappear in a mass of impressionist clichés. Miss Sitwell's essays on Shakespeare in *New Writing and Daylight* are typical; typical too is her description of Yeats's *Crazy Jane* poems as "wild dark and passionate." Another phase of this degeneration can be seen in the critical essays which appear in *Poetry Quarterly*. These well-intentioned attempts to explain and justify the very youngest poets are pathetic in their innocence of analytical procedure. Vivienne Koch, an American, is the only contributor to this series with any awareness of essential technique. A generation of good taste, polite homage and propagandist belles-lettres has obviously done its work only too well. Standards have been forgotten for so long that young writers hardly know how to begin to reassert them.

What the situation cries for is a vital alliance of criticism and scholarship, an alliance which, by regenerating criticism, would again make it possible for literature to live. By scholarship I am far from meaning pedantry. I mean education in the experience of the past which is realized and completed by the present. The special resources of a university are justified because they encourage this completion, because the conception of tradition they invoke is a conception pledged to contemporary forces, gaining vision and strength from dedication to them. The sense of engagement fosters the sense of history. It is indeed only in some form of engagement that the historical sense, which is also the critical sense, can become a function of human sensibility. To reanimate tradition in this manner, to create that continuity which makes past and present reciprocally meaningful, is the proper function of humanistic teaching. But far from honoring such an obligation the universities are unlikely even to recognize it.

The responsibility therefore falls on the harassed few who believe that living literature requires a living criticism. But they are crippled at the outset by lack of official support. The scheme of English universities allows little scope

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

for the modernist with standards; their preferences weigh heavily against giving him work on their staffs. American readers may find it difficult to grasp a situation where, with occasional exceptions, those responsible for our foremost magazines can entertain little hope of a university appointment. But having grasped the situation they will also see its consequence. The experience of *Scrutiny* has demonstrated that, given the present breakdown of literary values, the running of a critical magazine is a pedagogic as well as an academic problem. It is not enough to provide facilities for critics. You must also provide the critics to make use of those facilities. And when critics of modern literature are denied places in universities they can neither build up a panel of contributors nor rely on sympathizers to build up such a panel. Educated criticism is therefore unavailable at a time when the facilities for manufacturing reputations are increasing and the need for trained judgment is consequently greater than ever. I can confirm this argument from my experience with *Focus*. In four years of editorial work only five pieces of uncommissioned criticism have come into my office, none of them displaying a sense of evaluation or even familiarity with critical technique. The task facing *Focus* and *Politics and Letters* is to build up against this menacing shortage a tradition and unity of values and procedure.

Perhaps it is stressing the obvious to insist (though I dare not let the obvious go unmentioned) that the solution is not to make Joyce and Lawrence examination subjects and to turn academics loose among the moderns. The orthodox academic has no principle but learning just as the respectable Bloomsburian has no principle but taste. But neither erudition nor gusto are enough. What is needed is no less than an education in awareness, a concrete experimental knowledge of great literature settling into a personal pattern of critical judgments. That pattern cannot be defined in the abstract, since to do so would be to substitute rules for standards. But it can always be defined (in the only sense in which definition matters) in response to a particular poem's logic, in living through and grasping its individual achievements, the specific character of its right to be. "Works of literature," Professor L. C. Knights remarks, "are only kept alive by being *possessed* by individuals as intimate parts of their own living experience; and . . . they are only so possessed when they are re-created by each reader from the action and interaction of the minute particulars of which they are composed." But the possession of poems through this vivifying analysis is also the possession of standards which live wholly in these specific experiences and which have neither significance nor authority beyond them. What is achieved is consequently a mutual re-creation. The principles remain both flexible and vital through their persistent submission to the literary fact and the fact itself is valued and located by the context of tradition to which it asks to belong.

Given this conception of criticism and literature the problem is to devise

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

those practical measures which would restore the reality to this creative ideal. It is a measure of the seriousness of the situation that there are so few proposals that one can realistically make. One can hope for little more than local recoveries spreading by force of precept and even these depend on discriminating patronage. The few magazines concerned with a critical tradition should be subsidized, to make their existence less precarious and to make it possible for them to pay contributors. Bursaries should be created for intelligent criticism and their disposal controlled by the right type of teacher and critic. English Schools where vital analytic evaluation is encouraged should be supported to the maximum extent; developing the few facilities for serious education is even more important than assisting writers and magazines. If the convictions they encourage are deep enough to be potent, these measures, over a period of some years, might inject new life into our literary tradition. But looking at the situation in England I see no hope of even these minor miracles. Whatever the circumstances, the critic's responsibility remains what it always has been—the concrete and passionate reassertion of values. His work will bring him under fire from both the academies and Bloomsbury: from the former because of his insistence that a literary tradition should be completed and vitalized by its meaning in the present; from the latter because of his determination to invigorate contemporary writing with the values established by the traditional past. Both authorities will also dislike him because of his methodical advocacy of standards; and if, as he frequently must, he pursues this loyalty in the face of learning and gusto, he will often be accused of not having his fair share of either. Under such circumstances the mortality rate must be high and many critics will turn into Dons or reviewers. The remainder must safeguard not only their integrity but also their sense of proportion—a sense easy to relax in the face of neglect and misstatement with their consequent incitements to retaliatory action. From all this it is evident that a critic cannot go far without a sense of vocation. He must not only have convictions but also an obstinate sense of their authority, a steadfast belief in the astringent force and fertility of values. Only then can he convince others that better literature cannot be written in our time until vital criticism is more fully acknowledged and read.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Mozart: Three Elevations

JOSEPH KERMAN

THE SYMPHONIES OF MOZART, by *Georges de Saint-Foix,* translated from the French by Leslie Orrey. Alfred A. Knopf. $3.00.

MOZART'S OPERAS, A Critical Study, *by Edward J. Dent.* Second edition. Oxford. $6.00.

MOZART'S PIANO CONCERTOS, by *C. M. Girdlestone.* Cassell & Co., London and Toronto. $6.50.

A COMPANION TO MOZART'S PIANO CONCERTOS, by *Arthur Hutchings.* Oxford. $5.50.

THE STUDIES of M. de Saint-Foix and Professors Dent and Girdlestone are not new; all of them are famous enough in the Mozart literature to have now been reprinted in England and America. Each with characteristic advantage and prejudice gives us a one-dimensional Mozart through one of the genres that he used, the symphony, opera, and the piano concerto. In the long run the limitations of each plane view are less decisive than the care with which the drawings are rendered.

The least satisfying of the three is M. de Saint-Foix's very rapid sketch of *The Symphonies of Mozart,* which first appeared in Paris in 1932 (this is the first American edition). The author was not allowed, or did not allow himself, space to do much more than mention all the symphonies before the last three, date them, pigeon-hole them according to influence, and bless them with an occasional superlative. As the current ideas about the historical position of these works are largely due to Saint-Foix, he has every right to review them again in his book; but this does not get us very far with the music itself, and the critical remarks are too summary to be of any real use. Very sensibly, he concentrates what little analysis and detail he has room for on the last three symphonies (E-flat, G-minor, "Jupiter"), which occupy him for nearly half of this small book. Some interesting nineteenth-century criticisms are quoted at length: Berlioz thought that the first movement of the G-minor is "admirably fashioned and full of charming fancies," and that the last is "full of verve, strewn with fragments of adorable melody." Possibly many readers will find the actual analyses of these masterpieces more illuminating than I have; it is nevertheless more than disappointing, in a book with this title, to find no more than a twelve-hundred-word précis on the "Prague" Symphony.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

And one may ask why the eminent *musicologue* chose the symphonies for his exposition of "the universality of Mozart's genius," in his only popular publication on the subject of his special study. The symphonies give a particularly incomplete picture of Mozart's mature period of composition, which is conveniently reckoned from 1781, when he finally broke from his father, the archbishop, and Salzburg, to settle independently in Vienna for the ten years left to his life. From 1782-6 concertos entirely replaced symphonies in his output, with the exception of the "Haffner" Symphony of 1782 and the "Linz" of 1783; this is the great period of the twelve masterpieces that stand at the core of his concerto repertory, as well as three preliminary works. Afterwards there was the symphony for Prague, just contemporary with the great C-major Concerto, K.503, which ends that impressive series—for by 1786 Mozart was no longer the popular virtuoso, and had little use for concertos. Now he wrote operas: *Figaro* in 1786, with some of the last of the twelve concertos; *Don Giovanni* in 1787; *Cosi fan tutte* in 1789-90; *Tito* and *The Magic Flute* in 1791. From these last five years there are two concertos only, the disappointing "Coronation," K.537, in 1788, and K.595 in B-flat at the beginning of 1791; and only three symphonies, the three last works written together in the summer of 1788. There are no symphonies at all from Mozart's last three years; but there are more than thirty from the time before he came to Vienna, from the ingenious imitations of the *Wunderkind* to the graceful and manly works of the young Salzburgian of twenty-four, hesitating after his return from Paris. Saint-Foix is called by his publisher "the greatest living Mozart authority," and this reputation is based first of all on a work of minute sensibility and scholarship on the music of Mozart's first twenty-one years, written with Téodor de Wyzewa in 1912. He is fascinated by the extraordinary development of that delicate child, and so he is fascinated by the symphonies; but it is a considerable error to imagine that this fascination can be conveyed to the reader simply by mentioning Schobert and van Swieten and quoting symphonic *incipits*. One is not persuaded that Mozart's symphonies are "the most intimate revelations of his 'ego'," though they do have certain uniquely precious qualities which I think Professor Girdlestone neglects, and which M. de Saint-Foix is unable to clarify within the scope of this book.

It is surely the operas that offer the richest survey of Mozart's mature music, and especially of the gradual change into the undefinable style of his very last years, enthusiasm for which marks the final ascent of the present-day fad for Mozart. This is no concern of Professor Dent in his classic, *Mozart's Operas;* the book is about the dramatic structure of these operas in relation to the lyric theater of the eighteenth century, and describes the music in them only briefly and always strictly from this relevant point of view. With this reservation it is certainly one of the best books there are about opera or about Mo-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

zart, and few more intelligent and better informed books on music in general, to say nothing of better written ones, can be recommended to the amateur or to the musical specialist. This second edition, shockingly belated, has been rewritten extensively within the original plan. Dent says that the sections now omitted consist of propaganda and elementary exhortations no longer so necessary in 1949 as they were in 1913, but this is over-modest; many valuable insights and instructive incidental digressions have been replaced, but not superseded, by new insights and other interesting digressions, and most of the elementary comments still need to be read today. Dent's admirers can spend happy hours comparing the two books; the style has been tightened all along, well-chosen adjectives have been inserted, and there is now more of that brisk, caustic, and chauvinistic tone that is so pleasant in English musical criticism (see especially the new chapter "Mozart as a Classic"). It is not for me to say that Dent assumes more authority for his *ex cathedra* remarks than he actually commands; his learning, his common sense, and his practical sense of the theater are equally imposing, and the way they are all combined for a basic aesthetic examination of the operas for the non-specialist is marvelously right and a paragon for all such efforts. I was sorry to lose a favorite sentence from the old edition:

> . . . Don Alfonso so obviously pulls all the strings that one begins to wonder if he is not really Don Lorenzo or Don Wolfgango.

but there are others to replace it:

> In all countries, even in our own, we find the same tendency to regard nationalism in music as a merit . . .

I take this to be exactly as ingenuous as young Barberina the gardener's daughter in *Figaro*.

Dent also says that he has revised many of his critical judgments after thirty years' experience with Mozart in the theater. But as a matter of fact there are few changes in his essential businesslike attitudes, which are pertinent and revealing though I hardly need say that they are not all equally comprehensive. Dent is perhaps even more convinced of the importance of *Idomeneo* as a standard of operatic dignity and grandeur:

> If they had any understanding of *Idomeneo* they would be compelled to admit at once that the four popular operas are not only packed with trivialities, but that there are hardly any isolated numbers among them which could possibly claim affinity of style to that of *Idomeneo*. I write the word 'triviality' with deliberation . . .

He has now become more sensitive to the overall pace of all the operas, especially *Entführung*, and he includes a very interesting and just analysis of the similarities between *Figaro* and *Don Giovanni*, which critics overlook in their enthusiasm for the individuality of Mozart's late operas. But there are still only a few pages on each opera (perhaps one or two more now) that treat the

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

music itself in any specific way, and it is as big a mistake to regard this book as the last word on Mozart's operas as to miss reading it altogether. I certainly share Mr. Eric Blom's regret that the author did not take the opportunity of a new edition to illuminate the music in the operas more fully. But while Dent is well aware of the dominant role of music in Mozart's operas, he is no less aware of the universal problem that confronts anyone who tries to write sensibly about music: generalizations need to be documented by careful analyses if they are to mean very much, but musical analyses are technical, cumbersome, and to most readers exceedingly dull. *Mozart's Operas* was written in a spirit of propaganda, and with opera one must first establish dramatic validity; then, with competent productions fairly well instituted, the music may be examined at leisure. Perhaps this examination could not have been made very intelligently in 1913; thanks largely to Dent, it can and certainly should be made now. It can build on the findings and attitudes of his admirable preliminary study, and until it is made neither edition of this study can be considered outdated.

Writing about opera, Dent has the advantage (and knows it) of being able to make an interesting and at the same time relevant book by talking around the music almost all the time. Professor Girdlestone has no such advantage with Mozart's piano concertos; there is nothing for it but to plough right in with detailed discussion of individual compositions. His book is perhaps twice the length of Dent's, and certainly less lively in style or thought, but I have found it infinitely more exciting. With no didactic or controversial purpose, Girdlestone seeks an approach to the unique aesthetic personality of each concerto, and an understanding of Mozart's control of the genre as it develops from composition to composition. Quite properly he insists more on the growth of Mozart's inspiration than on his technique; but here for once is a critic who proceeds on the assumption that the two are inseparable. The exposition is rich and leisurely, almost bewildering in its loving care for detail; it is only through momentary detail that one can accumulate an appreciation of a whole work in its full blood, only through such appreciation of all the works that one can gauge the achievement of the group. Here and there Girdlestone may miss a point, but one can own nothing but admiration for his warm sympathy for Mozart, his taste, sensibility, and critical penetration—and critical discipline, too; few books on music this size have recourse to less extraneous material. The writing is limpid and serious, never ingenious, only occasionally warmed to a faint purple, and every statement carries the weight and responsibility of a long-devoted intimacy with the music. The strongest impression that the book leaves is an almost obsessive preoccupation with Mozart's work.

While the analyses are no more "technical" than the widely-praised essays of Tovey, for example, they take longer; it is assumed that the reader has some acquaintance with the concertos, has access to scores or record-sets, and

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

can read the profuse musical examples in the text. The reader who considers the examination too close may perhaps find Professor Hutchings' *Companion* less useless than I shall presently suggest; he will never get very close to any artist unless he affords him the elementary courtesy of time and concentration. He will certainly miss a lot by skipping Girdlestone's constant references and comparisons to other instrumental compositions of Mozart, which are excellently characterized—the G-minor Quintet, for one. I know no better discussions of the meaning of various keys to Mozart than those at the ends of Girdlestone's main chapters. The book would have been helped in a number of places by a more professional approach to text-critical matters; strange, for example, that the author is undisturbed by the fact that much of the piano part of the "Coronation" Concerto is not by Mozart at all. But it is more important that he has developed extreme sensitivity to the most fundamental element of a concerto style, the balance or unbalance between the solo instrument and the band. It is with growing pleasure that one shares his understanding of the astonishingly varied shades of meaning implied by cooperation or strife of one kind or another between the two protagonists, and of the firm character that this stamps on each one of these marvelous concertos. The distinction between the varieties of *entrejeu* is Girdlestone's most original and valuable insight, even more fruitful than his detailed revelation of Mozart's use of the various forms for concerto movements.

The selection of the piano concertos as typical of Mozart's writing will not surprise anyone who knows Einstein's *Mozart,* where they are treated as the "synthesis" of his instrumental music; the mature composer spent more time and care on the concerto than on any other genre except opera. This is not the place to complain that the concertos are too little played. Girdlestone examines them in close relation to Mozart's life and work as a whole; indeed the original French edition of 1939 was more appropriately entitled *Mozart et ses concertos pour piano* (mistranslated with or without the author's connivance? see p. 491). My only general criticism of the study is that it does push the concertos a little too far. As I have already shown in outline, these works are concentrated in what Wyzewa called *La grande période de virtuosité,* from 1784-6, the time just preceding the composition of the great operas; and though there are odd concertos from later, and earlier, in Mozart's career, this period has exerted its spell strongly enough on Girdlestone to orient his love of Mozart in a special way. He tends rather to forget all about the operas, which are closer in style to the concertos than to any other instrumental form, and seems not to admit an essential distinction, as I see it, between symphonies and quartets on the one hand, and concertos on the other. With concertos and light operas, the works that represent him best, Mozart never attempts to deny the basic quality of entertainment in the music; there is always the overt, almost disarming display of *galanterie,* a straightforward concession to be made before Mozart's genius

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

can superimpose its individual organization. But in the symphony, the string quartet and quintet, and of course *opera seria*, Mozart's basic conception is altogether serious, even heroic, and it is only the vocabulary that is sometimes *galant*. (This respect for the quartet and the symphony is one of Mozart's most curious anticipations of Romanticism, which I suppose may have grown out of the deep impression made on the boy by Haydn's music of 1770-2. Later Haydn became more *galant*, and in the 1780's his symphonies and quartets are generally less serious in intent than Mozart's.) The most permeating imprint of *galanterie* on the piano concertos is their virtuosity, which is not to say virtuosity in the writing for the solo instrument—Girdlestone shows that they exhibit this in very varying degrees—but virtuosity of composition which distinguishes them all. As the most brilliantly written of all Mozart's works they occupy a special place for the devotee. But while the *galant* conception urged Mozart to the most dazzling kind of domination over trivialities, the more serious framework of the other music allowed him to work more directly, perhaps more honestly, perhaps less successfully, with material that he could treat in his own terms. This too is an aspect of the essential Mozart.

Girdlestone's monograph is still the best thing of its kind that I know, and I feel strongly that it is exactly such studies that are needed most seriously in musical criticism. It already has its admirers. Professor Hutchings' *Companion to Mozart's Piano Concertos* is an abbreviated and ostensibly enlivened version of Girdlestone's book, to which the author makes handsome acknowledgement. He follows the same general plan and the same general opinions, but instead of conducting serious analyses, he imitates Tovey, fatally, in filling up his book with personal anecdotes, long digressions, tilts at windmills, and touches of wit and whimsy. Nothing could fall flatter; Hutchings has neither the authority nor the humor for this sort of thing, and he over-writes quite repulsively. Some new and good comments (see K.449) are concealed by a mass of chatter that is too often trivial, secondhand, and irresponsible; it is perky to claim to be a follower of Tovey, and then to breeze through an explanation of first-movement form without even mentioning tonality, a subject on which the old gentleman had a positive mania—I am rather sorry that this *Companion* has been circulated and discussed in this country while the parent book of Girdlestone's remains largely unknown.

Hutchings is always ready to throw pieces of Mozart into the ashcan; one of these is the slow movement of Mozart's last concerto, K.595 in B-flat, which is fairly well known through the recording by Artur Schnabel. He chatters around it for rather less than a page: "something as simple as a folk-song, without the sincere naïvety, is inordinately repeated and protracted by stuff which resembles the simperings of a woman who thinks she is more alluring if she affects the lisping of a baby." Girdlestone too could show

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

more than he does with this piece. He is happier with the concertos of *La grande période,* and senses "irrevocable parting" here—like Saint-Foix, he is inclined to be rather more romantic than is now in fashion. This neglect provides me with a first pretext to write about the movement; a second is that through it I can approach a matter that is poorly handled in all the books under review —but nothing can be done without a certain amount of formal analysis, for the piece lives largely by Mozart's beautiful realization of a simple musical structure. And finally this *larghetto* (Schnabel prefers *Lento possibile*) can also show in microcosm the genius for the concerto that Girdlestone traces fully through Mozart's career. It is the last, and by far the best, of a distinctive and very *galant* type of movement which Mozart developed for concertos, and had first used for the D-minor Concerto, K.466; and it is so similar to the *larghetto* of the "Coronation" Concerto in D, K.537, that it can only rightly be considered as a much improved revision of that piece. One can see a great deal by comparing them as closely as possible.

The thoroughly *galant* idea behind all these movements, exemplified by the "Coronation," is that the soloist can expose *and decorate* a drastically simple opening melody containing many repeats. This tune is always in the elementary form *a-a-b-a-coda,* in which both *a* and *b* are the simplest kind of eight-bar phrases made up out of two equal members, and in which *a* closes naively on the tonic—an especially quiet effect which Mozart capitalized on from the start, but only realized fully in the B-flat Concerto. Here the simplicity of the theme is that of the Three Genii in *The Magic Flute;* after the usual placid tonic pedal at the start, a series of bare parallel sixth chords, dear to Palestrina, Dufay, and the Priests of Isis and Osiris, float down from an unsuspected height. Ordinarily the orchestra in these movements hardly dares raise its head; its wisdom would offend the vanity of the soloist, and of the opening melody it is allowed only the repeat of *a* and the final *coda,* in strict alternation with the piano. But in the B-flat Concerto the orchestra becomes an individual, and so, miraculously, does the solo instrument. At the repetition of *a* there are characteristic changes in the melodic line, very significant new dynamic marks, and some reharmonization: the tonic pedal now lasts for three whole bars, a typically orchestral expansion which emphasizes even further the simplicity of the theme, and gives it warmth and melancholy that the soloist had not perceived. And the little orchestral *coda* is not only twice as long as that of the "Coronation," but is also imbued with a dignity and mature emotion that surpass anything that the piano can achieve.

The soloist is then doubly welcome after the tune is over. In all these movements the basic form of the whole is A-B-A ("A" comprises *a-a-b-a-coda*), and this too can be dull enough if Mozart does not turn it to some account, as he does in the B-flat Concerto. "B" is always given over entirely to a florid piano *cantilena,* which can be duller still if it is not decorated; pianists (including

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Schnabel) never realize how much Mozart has left for them to fill in, and they ought to read Girdlestone before trying the concertos. Indeed at the analogous place in the D-minor Concerto, Mozart's brilliant improvisation over a colorless harmonic background in the strings had created the whole musical effect. The "Coronation," already more thoughtful, modulates and even allows the orchestra to comment very, very slightly on the long solo exhibition. In the B-flat Concerto the melodies and the key-plan are almost a replica of the "Coronation," but a world of immediacy and depth is added by a discreet but increasingly lovely orchestral part. After eight bars wind instruments join the piano, and support the modulation; at the most remote tonality the routine in the strings ceases altogether, and a long note held by a bassoon provides a "sober but expressive detail of scoring," as Girdlestone says. With diffident and sad ceremony an oboe joins the bassoon and marks the modulation back to the tonic on the off-beats; but it is the piano that takes away their last expected note, adding a slight but decisive personal passion to a conventionally pathetic cadence. In the "Coronation" Mozart here allowed the soloist a free cadenza to prepare for the recapitulation of "A"; now he writes out eight bars of dominant pedal, so that the whole rich orchestra can assist. This pedal is expectant but immobile, and the orchestra seems to give the strangely subdued piano courage for the inevitable return.

The earlier pieces would lead us to expect *a-b* from the soloist, then *a-coda* from the orchestra, still completely separate until the final *coda*. Mozart realized that this arrangement is anti-climactic. Half-way through *b* wind instruments join the piano once again, and the original plain phrase of eight bars is extended for five more of dominant preparation. The effect of the end of the "B" section is echoed, and for a sublime reason: it is not the orchestra that plays the final return of *a*, but a breathless combination of the piano, again, with violins and a flute doubling *the melody only* in octaves. No one who has heard the concerto will have forgotten the incredible effect of strange silence that this creates. The theme had presumably been reduced to its simplest possible basis by the orchestral tonic pedal; but now its simplicity and beauty are still further clarified, its melodic contour concentrated, its melancholy etherealized and stilled. Neither of the two protagonists is dominant, and I think no plausible pianistic decoration can alter their unique relationship. To me this is the most moving instance of Mozart's uncanny sensitivity to *entrejeu* between piano and band; there is no orchestral color like it until Berlioz. Hutchings says of the theme of this *larghetto:* "As the movement is in rondo form, we must hear the phrase eight times, and for me that is four times too often." This is worthy of the Emperor Joseph II. "Exactly as many as necessary, Your Highness!"

Earlier concertos provide many fine instances of Mozart's characterization of the orchestra, and also of harmonic subtleties like the culminating dominant pedals that so delicately attend the final return of the first theme. But this

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

return itself, at the same time intense and eternally still, belongs only to the works of Mozart's last months. Girdlestone describes the spirit of these works searchingly without understanding what is to me their outstanding characteristic: a new control over the medium, a transcendence and distillation of technique which is Mozart's most profoundly individual achievement. In *The Magic Flute* he can hardly resolve a dominant-seventh chord without shedding a strange and beautiful light on it which no other composer has comprehended—Dent has even abbreviated the few sentences he had allowed himself on the musical character of Mozart's "third period." As a child Mozart imitated and synthesized with a sensitivity that has fascinated Saint-Foix and everyone else with more than a passing interest in the composer's personality. As a young man in Vienna he reacted violently and always differently to a musical and social environment which he understood too well and to which he could never adjust himself for any length of time. Like Beethoven, Mozart went through a long period, long at least by his time-scale, during which he composed practically nothing. When he came to write the *Requiem*, he had attained a new depth and serenity and purification, an indifference to all externals, a dominant grasp of musical materials which could produce the mysterious simplicity and power of our *larghetto*. Mozart would have lived to become a great man, and the more closely one knows his last music, the sharper is the pathos of his self-neglect and early death.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Film Chronicle

GEORGE BARBAROW

EISENSTEIN AND SOME ARTISTIC DILEMMAS

SINCE 1925, the year of his own *Potemkin* and of Griffith's last important film, *Isn't Life Wonderful?*, the one name of greatest significance in the cinema has been that of Sergei M. Eisenstein. No discussion of movies as art during these years has been complete without some mention of this name; in a sense, it is "the Eisenstein era." This period of twenty-five years has also seen the film medium aesthetically weakened by two kinds of corruption: the synchronized sound track and financial-political monopoly. The "Eisenstein era," if one faces the facts squarely, is the era best described in Seymour Stern's bitter but incontrovertible essay, *The Bankruptcy of Cinema as Art*; as Stern concludes, it is the time when the cinema became "the pointless joke of American civilization" (and of other civilizations too, with their knights-errant Laurence Oliviers and Roberto Rossellinis). Today there is little the earnest student of film art can do beyond wearing out his eyes gazing at frightful monstrosities on the screen and, with greater profit, reading two books by Eisenstein himself, both ably translated and edited by Jay Leyda, who has shown outstanding good sense in retaining as much of the author's style and his general ideas as possible.[1]

Film Form comprises a dozen essays selected from the several hundred tossed off at intervals during the career of the dynamic Russian moviemaker and cinematics professor; in addition there is the short "Notes From a Director's Laboratory," and a new translation of the famous "Statement" on the nature and uses of the sound track. About one-third of these writings appear in English for the first time. Taken *in toto*, these essays are indispensable for an understanding of Eisenstein's life and work, not only because they cover most of the continuing period of cinematic "bankruptcy" and its extraordinary diversity of problems, but also because they help to make sense of *The Film Sense*.

Film Form defines *The Film Sense* by revealing what Eisenstein's natural way of writing was. He was constantly composing smashing essays aimed at whatever problems in cinematics he was troubled with at any given moment, his formal style being made up of analogic, expository, stentorian, hortatory language. The earlier book is not actually a book, but a group of four essays very loosely connected, belonging to only a small section of the author's career. Now

[1] THE FILM SENSE, by *Sergei Eisenstein*. Harcourt, Broce. 1942 (w. rev. appendix, 1947). FILM FORM, by *Sergei Eisenstein*. Harcourt, Brace. 1949.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

we may study and compare sixteen of these Eisensteinian "explosions," and see that they are not related to any large reflective scheme of cinematics so much as to the difficulties and frustrations of an inventive, extremely vigorous, and enthusiastic moviemaking personality during the days and years when the movie medium happened to be going to pot. The proper book for these writings to appear in is an inclusive volume entitled *Film Essays of S. M. Eisenstein, 1923-1948,* and we may hope that the publishers will one day issue such a book, with additional essays, and that the editor will continue to be the devoted Mr. Leyda.

The personality that emerges from the two books is not the one crudely delineated as far back as 1942 by Dwight Macdonald to implement an anti-Stalinist "line," and continued most recently by Waclaw Solski (*Commentary,* March, 1949). It has been the fashion to analyze "the Eisenstein tragedy" primarily in terms of culture purges and other political events as if at one time the Soviet artist had "freedom" which was "blighted" by the bureaucracy. Somehow or other, this line implies, Eisenstein, if there had been no purges, might have crowned the early promise of *Strike, Potemkin, October,* and *Old and New* with even greater films, since he was an artist, or a potential artist. This line avoids the patent fact of cinematic decline everywhere throughout the world, not just in Russia, and not for basically different reasons in different countries. Why should one artist "grow" while all the others were wilting? The only moviemakers of the 1930's who showed some flashes of the old vigor and insight were Chaplin, Clair, and Dovzhenko; and the only new moviemaker of the first rank to appear was Jean Vigo, who died (aged thirty) on the threshold of mastery, with but four films made; add to this state of affairs the virtual extinction of "avant-garde experimentalism," and at last the relative unimportance of political factors becomes obvious. There must have been another reason behind the failures of American, French, and German as well as Soviet moviemakers; and the common reason underlying all the failures is, it seems, the incompatibility of sight and sound, which can plainly be observed bedeviling such an expert as René Clair if one sees *Le Chapeau de Paille d'Italie* (silent) and *Le Million* (talkie) on successive days; and which can also be discerned beyond possibility of mistake if one rigorously compares *Monsieur Verdoux* with *Modern Times;* in *Verdoux,* even Chaplin, free as he was of both financial and political bosses, could not achieve a suitable combination of aural and visual images.

Eisenstein characteristically rammed into the technico-aesthetic sound-track problem with the delicacy of a bull. The fat was in the fire, the door was wide open to every wandering germ of sight-sound combination, and Eisenstein, who was apparently all action and little reflection, occupied himself with trying to stamp out the diseases that attacked the movie medium from all directions. The primary sickness was, and still is, naturalism of an exasperatingly literal sort that infected audiences and movie-makers alike. Eisenstein disposed of this

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

in the *Statement,* a manifesto declaring that "counterpoint" between sight and sound images is not only possible but absolutely necessary. He was probably surprised by his "contrapuntal" method's failure to defeat naturalism on the screens of the world; it is to his credit, however, and our gain that he did not give up the unequal battle but continued in his scenarios, lectures, and in these essays, to search for some definitive way to utilize the powers of microphone and camera in concert, and thus to evolve what is euphemistically called The Total Film, actually an hermaphroditic form like opera. Eisenstein's search seems like the search for the philosopher's stone, the Absolute of Balzac's *Recherche;* it is pathetic, and even at times comic, but it is not tragic. As we know now, the transmutation of the elements cannot change the form of the chairs we sit on; and so if there is some great aesthetic fusion of recorded sights and sounds hidden in the characteristics of movie projectors and electric phonographs, this hypothetical fusion will probably not change the enormous primacy of visual elements in motion pictures. If you let in one other sense (hearing), you cannot logically exclude touch, taste, and smell; and that way has been blocked for all time by Aldous Huxley.

Eisenstein accepted sound without hesitation. He was not one to curl up and fade away when it became clear that sound films were going to drive silent movies off the screen. He was eclectic, which is plain from his readiness to further his arguments with extraordinary analogies drawn from the histories of all the major arts; he was a combiner, a synthesizer, because he wished and hoped that the combination could be found. Here is an example from *Synchronization of Senses:*

> From all the plastic means of expression at our disposal we can surely find those whose movement harmonizes not only with the movement of the rhythmic pattern, but also with the movement of the melodic *line.* We already have some idea as to what these means might be, but since we are about to deal with this question in full detail, we will mention at this point that we can assume that these elements will probably be drawn basically from a "linear" element of plastic art.

This wishful assumption is stated right after he approvingly quotes Lanz:

> " . . . strictly speaking, one does not 'hear' a melody. We are able or unable to follow it, which means that we either have or have not the ability to organize the tones into a higher unity . . ."

Yet Eisenstein proposes to "draw" the line that we can neither see nor hear, and hopes to organize *both* auditory and visual "tones" into that mysterious "higher unity" where rhythmic, melodic, and visual patterns will "harmonize," to say nothing of words (with multiple meanings), accents, voice intonations, noises, timbres, etc. We are brought up short in the midst of this fuzzy speculation by Igor Stravinsky's remark: "Even under the best conditions it is

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

impossible for the human brain to follow the ear and the eye at the same time."

Eisenstein's war against naturalism, which is absolutely right in principle, was considerably hampered by the unsolved difficulties of synchronization; this partially explains his meager output of films after 1930. Before 1930, he completed four films in six years; afterwards he finished only two (*Nevsky* and *Ivan, Part I*) in eighteen years, and while making these two, which turned out disappointingly theatrical, it is reported that he was at constant odds with his actors, who had been trained in the naturalistic methods of the Moscow Art Theater. There is very little evidence of ideological conflict between Eisenstein and the culture-commissars. When he might have protested publicly against the excision of Trotsky's image from *October* (1928) with fair chances of success, he did not. Moreover, his struggle during the middle 1930's with the director of the Soviet Film Industry, one Shumiatsky, is reported to have been a case of the Chief's usurpation of the artist's functions, much as any producer interferes in Hollywood every day, saying, "I'm paying the bills; you are an employee."

These examples seem to indicate that Eisenstein's public problems were similar to those faced by film artists everywhere; if we think his actions shameful, we nevertheless cannot call them primarily *Russian* actions; if "under Western eyes" the great moviemaker had attempted the "honorable" course of voluntary exile, we must admit that his prospects of making good films anywhere would have been equally dim. This was the period of "bankruptcy," and Eisenstein, after he had played out his adventures in Hollywood and in Mexico, knew as well as anyone else what could happen in the Western world.

Much more serious indictments than that he slavishly followed the Stalin line, or that he tragically and disastrously attempted to follow it, can be drawn against Eisenstein. The evidence is in his films and in his essays: (1) He was too often fascinated with literal horror images—something the Greeks regarded as obscene—as in *Potemkin*, *October*, and the essay *The Montage of Attractions*. He wished to shock the audience, both physiologically and psychologically. (2) As an "engineer-artist," he was interested too literally in measurable and tangible things, and seemed to believe that he could solve aesthetic problems mathematically. This may explain the heavy reliance upon graphs and diagrams in his essays, and his poor writing. Also, his insistence upon literal "dynamism" and "conflict," reminiscent of stresses and strains in a beam, is oversimple. (3) Eisenstein's citations of Pushkin, Milton, Leonardo, and many prose fictioneers to show that they understood "montage" and that they too had "the film sense," being a function of his eclecticism, are too often plain propaganda, a looking for support from the accepted arts. This is not only harmful to aesthetics in general but also to cinematics in particular, for it seems to imply that there is only one art, cinematics, which is absurd.

We may take these essays as news and notes from a practitioner of the "one

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

art" written during the era of wreckage, the Age of Eisenstein, and must duly thank Mr. Leyda for his indefatigable and intelligent presentation of them. Without these books we would be altogether helpless before the critics and talkers who see Eisenstein simply as a victim of Stalin. With these books available, it becomes clear that Eisenstein was discussing something else entirely: the art of the film, a field about which this brilliant and dedicated man could never learn enough to suit his ideals.

CURRENT AND "CHOICE"

Realizing that the movie-hunger is deeply ingrained in its readership, *Time* magazine weekly prints a list of films that are going the rounds. Ladder-fashion, the bottom title disappears when the latest "choice" item is added at the top. This is convenient for everyone, because the picture that makes Current-and-Choice, like a chip of wood bobbing to the surface in flood-time, stands some chance of being noticed. If you see all the films on the list, you will see nearly everything that has some slight claim to distinction. There is one important drawback in this system, however. The selection is not made on any basis of aesthetics, for then months might pass without new additions. *Time*'s editors know that *Time*'s readers want to talk about "the newest and best" whatever the cause of distinction; thus there are reasons, not necessarily aesthetic, why *Time's* readers are talking about *Champion*, *Home of the Brave*, and *We Were Strangers*.

The producers of the first two films, Screen Plays, Inc., have rediscovered the familiar and logical axiom that you can "say more" if less of your capital is committed; they remember *Ox Bow Incident*. At the moment they are keeping their expenses down and simultaneously sprinkling their screen fables with Progressive dogmas: that the life of a prizefighter is brutal and probably pathetic, and that a Negro can experience considerable difficulty becoming a military hero. We seem to hear the bored professional radio announcer saying every hour on the hour, "Freedom Is Everybody's Job." The unfortunate colored man not only becomes a hero, but the dream also includes his rescue from madness by a kind-hearted liberal medico who "happens" to be on hand for the job.

The difference between SPI pictures and big-studio stuff is the presence of "ideas" like these, the obvious cheapness of the sets, and the absence of famous stars. Otherwise the style is the same. The structure is that of a play in 20-50 scenes, the camera aimlessly pans and tilts in all directions, and the talk goes on and on. Moreover, when sinister forces, such as the gambling syndicate in *Champion* are introduced, their presence is made known to the audience in an argument between Midge Kelly and his manager; it seems Midge can't have a championship match without promising to take a dive. The visualization on the screen consists of images of Midge and the manager. Although the

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

big point of the sequence is the fix, the gamblers are not shown; they exist only in the sound track described by the manager; meanwhile, watching the faces of the hero and his foil gets tiresome; later, the syndicate's beat-up men appear after Midge has crossed the mysterious tycoons by winning the fight. The detailed beating-up that follows is unnecessary, sadistic and brutal; it is the climax of a chase scene which is loaded with moth-eaten suspense clichés. The entire sequence shows clearly enough that SPI is operating under the spell of two standard Hollywood convictions: that the camera must gaze at the principal actor 90 per cent of the time, and that ideas cannot be visually expressed. This last is true enough if the term "idea" means no more than "a conception formulated in words." From the evidence of modern motion pictures, this definition is apparently the one we are all living by, for the great majority of the *visual* expressions on the screen are crude clubbings, fisticuffs, male & female lip frictions, shootings of guns, and auto wrecks; this is the common coin of the movie houses. For anything more complex, we are expected to listen to what the troglodytes are saying to each other and to us.

We Were Strangers, the latest from John Huston, is bearable if you can stand a mixture of 85 per cent grotesquerie and 15 per cent good workmanship. The 15 per cent comprises the voting scene in the Cuban Senate at the beginning, the street scenes in riot-nervous Havana (in the vein, if without the quality, of similar scenes in Russian and German films of the '20's), the fine shot of the Senator coming down the steps of his palace before being murdered, and the realization of extreme violence (seriously hurt by sentimentality) in the tommygun-and-dynamite defense of a house at the end. The grotesquerie is laughable when not boring; here is definitive proof that Jennifer Jones is incapable of performing the elementary chore of walking a treadmill in front of the traveling-camera rear-projection process shot, for instance. More seriously, the bulk of the picture shows the humorless Huston to be unaware of the latent satiric possibilities, and hence the chance for real ironic pathos, in the weird plot to tunnel through the graveyard, or in the disgustingly gross figure of the menacing secret policeman (compare a similar character beautifully worked into the picture by Fritz Lang in *Hangmen Also Die*). The 85 per cent also indicates once more that Huston is unable to think of a whole film as one piece, but only as a set of isolated scenes. For the overall structure he relies on the plays and novels from which he makes his pictures; he leans on them as on a crutch, and they can't stand the strain.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

REVIEWS

Every Poem an Epitaph

WILLIAM MEREDITH

T. S. ELIOT: THE DESIGN OF HIS POETRY, by *Elizabeth Drew.* Charles Scribner's Sons. $3.00.

WITH REFERENCE to T. S. Eliot's poems, we seem now to stand at the point of their least usefulness. That hard instruction which in their novelty they had to impart has been received and made good use of. We have our new poetry, and what its founder said is now common knowledge or can be better learned from later and smoother practitioners. But we are not yet in a position to use Eliot's poems as a fixed point; we cannot evaluate the sensibility that came with them, just because that sensibility is our own, the common sensibility of contemporary poetry. That it is also a very strange sensibility, and therefore still harder to assess from where we stand, is witnessed by the estrangement between contemporary poetry and the average reader. Finally, I think we do not really use Eliot's poems because we do not understand them well, and therefore are not as much moved by them as we need to be for poems to be useful. At the moment, then, it is no longer a revelation, this poetry, and not yet a dogma, but less useful than either of those, it is a kind of custom with us.

At this moment in our dealings with Eliot a wave of destructive criticism, heralded by Robert Hillyer's irresponsible attack in the *Saturday Review of Literature* this June, is to be expected. There are many readers, surely, who in good faith have despaired of finding in Eliot's work the poetry that they have been told is there, and who would willingly be absolved, by some authority, of the responsibility of reading such difficult verse. What is needed to hearten these readers is the present book by Elizabeth Drew, which is an honest and sensitive attempt to further a general understanding of Eliot's poems.

In her study of Eliot's major poems, Miss Drew has accomplished a task which I think none of the previous critical studies has done, the task of demonstrating how Eliot's major poems are related, or are, in fact, all of a piece. Other discussions of the unity of Eliot's poetry have perhaps *asserted* as much, and skillful readers may have recognized the very unity Miss Drew uncovers, but for this reader the unity had always appeared a trifle mechanical, a matter of recurrent images, references and attitudes rather than of a constant *intention.* In this book Elizabeth Drew seems to have discovered, by a means which will

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

strike many as extremely dubious, almost the exact history of the sensibility behind the poems. This history not only accommodates satisfactorily the incremental repetitions mentioned above, but also elucidates remarkably the total meanings of individual poems.

Readers who, like myself, have bogged down repeatedly at the task of holding together the longer poems as they read them, and who have in consequence taken to reading Eliot as a collection of short lyric passages of varying degrees of satisfaction, will be astonished at how the parts assemble themselves. By the joint prophecy of Jung and Miss Drew, these bones live.

Miss Drew's method, and do not be put off until you have seen how discreetly it is used, is to make a Jungian case history of Eliot's imagery. In the preface she gives and takes fair warning about the method:

> I have found what is, to me, an interesting parallel in symbolic content between the progression of dream symbols described by Jung as arising during what he calls "the integration of the personality" (and which he relates to the history of myth), and some of those appearing in Eliot's poetry during the course of its development. But this is not a book about rival schools of psychology and anthropology. . . . Psychology can suggest a good deal about the unconscious forces at work behind the conception of art, but it has limitations which make it a very poor critical instrument. It cannot touch the work of art itself, and it cannot distinguish between good art and bad art. . . . There has, however, been no attempt to write of the body of [Eliot's] poetry as a process of growth, as an "integration of the personality." The particular purpose of this book is to do that, and to help the general reader, and the student, to a fuller enjoyment of the individual poems by analysis and discussion.

Miss Drew's analyses and discussions proceed by the familiar pattern of paraphrase and cross-reference, usually up to the point where the total intellectual meaning of some larger division is in doubt. There, habitually, she turns to the design of Jung's archetypal imagery and sets that up beside Eliot. In *Marina*, for example, dealing with the lines:

> *Bowsprit cracked with ice and paint cracked with heat.*
> *I made this, I have forgotten*
> *And remember.*
> *The rigging weak and the canvas rotten*
> *Between one June and another September.*
> *Made this unknowing, half conscious, unknown, my own.*
> *The garboard strake leaks, the seams need caulking.*
> *This form, this face, this life*
> *Living to live in a world of time beyond me; let me*
> *Resign my life for this life, my speech for that unspoken,*
> *The awakened, lips parted, the hope, the new ships.*

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

she writes:

> Then with all the unaccountable pattern of dream, we hear of the strange ship whose bow the water is lapping. The sea-world and the dream-world meet. Pericles and Marina are together on this very insecure and dilapidated vessel which seems quite out of keeping with the perfection of the experience. But the significance of it is in the "I made this."

Then she quotes:

> As a human construction, the ship has the meaning (in the dream sequence of "transformation") of a system, method or way. Jung, *Integration of the Personality*, p. 189.

Again, in dealing with the trees in *Ash-Wednesday*, she derives her solution from this quotation from the same work:

> The appearance of trees as images, says Jung, are often "intermediate symbols" in the general archetype of transformation. They represent "rootedness, repose and growth . . . as also the union of sky and earth."

This recourse to Jung's patterns is not limited to specific parallels of imagery. The total experience of the "integration of the personality" is invoked, with the thesis that Eliot, like every major artist, accomplishes this experience anew for his own time. Miss Drew describes this pattern at one point in these terms:

> It is the experience of detachment from the world of objective reality as the centre of existence and the finding of "a new dimension" in which it can and must be contemplated and lived. Detachment too from the ego as the centre of interest and the discovery of a different centre. As such it involves the process of the death of an old life and the birth of a new, the process traced back by Frazer and other scholars as the inner meaning of the symbolism of the oldest Fertility rituals, and the basis of their development into tragic drama.

Because this integration is a protracted process, accomplished with great difficulty, Miss Drew does not look for the complete pattern in any one work, unless perhaps in *Four Quartets*. Rather, elements of the pattern appear throughout the poems. In the early poems, *Prufrock* and the Sweeney poems, for example, she finds chiefly the discontent with the "world of objective reality as the centre of existence." By the time of *The Waste Land* the destruction of the old self and old life has reached its most savage stage, but no location of a new center has been reached. In *Ash-Wednesday* there has been found the conviction of the existence of a new center, and the imagery deals with the withdrawal from the old; the new conviction is seen positively in the "recognition scenes" of the three "Ariel" poems, and negatively in the satiric attack of *Coriolan* on man-centered cultures. In *Four Quartets*, where growth and modification of symbols occurs on a large scale within one work, Miss Drew finds that both detachment and relatedness, both birth and death, are reconciled

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

and their natures revealed. The final symbols of the poem are shown also to be the final symbols of the "integration" pattern.

The value of this approach to the poems, apart from suggesting a number of valid readings for obscure passages, is that it accounts for the changing values which certain symbols have for Eliot in different poems. The values of symbols, in this scheme, change as the personality progresses through the stages of its transformation: the sea in *Prufrock* may be an escape to innocence; in *The Waste Land* water is the murderous refreshment of that which must drown to find life; while in *The Dry Salvages* water is both of those (no meaning is ever *revoked* from a symbol, but only added to and modified) and also a symbol of the race history and the vehicle of our faring forward.

Read in this light, not just images but whole poems can be seen to modify their predecessors—as Eliot puts it, every poem an epitaph. We can also understand better by this approach than by another why the middle poems, in particular, are in an essential way incomplete, and why it is possible for two competent critics to disagree as to whether *The Waste Land* ends in hope or despair; there was simply no image of resolution yet.

Miss Drew plods a good deal, but she avoids, it seems to me, the presumptions to which such an undertaking as this is liable. She approaches Eliot's states of belief and affection only through his printed work, and only with her avowed intention, to elucidate the poems. She does not force her theory, and indeed at the end of the book you can dismiss all of the Jungian parallels without losing the value of her exegesis. In the course of the work there are several specific errors in reading, and occasionally (like Brooks and Mathiessen here) she goes a long way to bring back a reading, *any* reading, for an obscure passage. She is less satisfactory than Cleanth Brooks on *The Waste Land,* and adds little to his essay. On the "Ariel" poems, *Coriolan* and *Four Quartets,* she is at her best.

If Miss Drew's book does as much as I have said to increase the understanding of Eliot's poems, it also exposes abruptly the incompleteness and partial failure of each of them. The large body of criticism and explication which these poems have required and annexed to themselves tell against them as useable poems. In requiring such paraphernalia, Eliot's work is unlike both good art and good myth. While the meaning of myths tends to be hidden or at least ambiguous, there is always a level of narrative meaning which is clear enough to give the symbols a surface life of their own. We are not in doubt as to *what is going on,* yet we sense that beneath the clear dramatic surface is another level, complete with all its meaningful ambiguities. In Eliot's poems, the mystery in the depths is sometimes quite lost in a mystery on the surface; how can we ponder what a poem *means,* unless we can tell what it *says?* For what it says, we rely on a surface life given the poems by critics like Miss Drew.

Eliot has failed to objectify the imagery which the critics are called upon to

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

solve. His failure to do this is due, I think, not to any theoretical misconception of the nature of poetry, but to a deficiency of sensibility. He has familiarized himself so thoroughly with the myths and symbols of our culture that these have a life and meaning for him that is unique; but it has cost him his feeling for what of all this is communicative, and what is not. A very significant and dynamic thing about our culture, the area of its ignorance, is evidently not known to him or respected as a vital force.

This insensitivity to the communicative force of symbols would be less serious if it were not re-enforced by another deviation from the norm in Eliot: his theory of poetry has insisted, largely for historical reasons, on the irrational nature of poetic communication. He has, I believe unnecessarily, chosen to emphasize this truth by eliminating rational transition and structure from his poems. There are readers of Eliot who deny the conjunction of these two errors, and others who say they are unimportant. Surely the work of Miss Drew atones for something. It is a measure of Eliot's power as a poet that such labors, on the part of critic and readers, continue to be felt rewarding.

Passion and Form

HOWARD NEMEROV

THE DIARY OF A WRITER, by *F. M. Dostoievsky*. Translated and annotated by Boris Brasol. Charles Scribner's Sons. $12.50

THE PUBLICATION of Dostoievsky's *Diary of a Writer* occupied for the most part the years between the completion of *The Possessed* and the composition of *The Brothers Karamazov*. Beginning in 1873 in *The Citizen*, where the articles ran for a year, the project was dropped during 1874-5 and then continued as a separate paper for two years; though regular publication ended after 1877 two further issues appeared—August, 1880, containing the Address on Pushkin, and January, 1881.

This diary is not, evidently, the private and more or less continuous record of inward experience, nor are literature and the technical problems of composition its major concern. It is composed of essays, sketches, polemics on topics of public moment, designed to fill a certain space and meet a deadline. Its main object was "to explain, as far as possible, the idea of our national spiritual independence, elucidating it in concrete facts as they appear . . . the *Diary* does not pretend to set forth monthly political articles; but it will endeavor to find and, as far as possible, to point out our national and popular point of

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

view also in current political events." Some literary criticism does appear, heavily emphatic upon "the people's truth"; that is, by no means specifically literary criticism, but the criticism of ideas contained in literary works, generally in terms of the operation of such ideas outside the works in which they were conceived and embodied (cf. for example his analysis of the eighth part of *Anna Karenina*). Several of the short stories, also, first appeared in the *Diary*: "A Little Boy at Christ's Christmas Tree," "Peasant Marei," "The Meek One" (given in Constance Garnett's translation as "A Gentle Spirit"), "The Dream of a Strange Man," "Bobok." Dostoievsky seldom discusses his own novels: of *Poor Folk* he records some of the circumstances of its composition and what Nekrasov and Bielinsky said about it; in speaking of *The Possessed* he is mainly concerned with the Nechaiev case, though later he compares the historian Granovsky with Stepan Trofimovich, whom he describes succinctly as follows: "a character of an idealist of the Forties portrayed by me in the novel *The Possessed* which our critics considered correct."

On the other hand one often finds echoes, in reminiscence or anticipation, of the fictions: of Myshkin's tirade against the Roman Catholic Church, of atrocities against children, of that Foma Danilov who became a subject of debate between Fyodor Pavlovich and Smerdyakov, of Ivan's question to Alyosha, of the queer humor of the man from underground, of the suicide of the poor young man in *The Possessed*. These curiously familiar relapses into greatness, which raise occasionally large questions about the relations of fiction to truth (even "the people's truth"), give a quality of nightmare to a work which I am sorry to say I found disappointing—tendentious, repetitive, and very often extremely dull. These three characteristics are quite well illustrated in Dostoievsky's attitude toward the Jew, an attitude possibly not exactly anti-Semitic but certainly and frequently indicative of a profound contempt. That the charge of anti-Semitism was at least plausible seems to have been brought sufficiently to his notice by indignant Jewish correspondents to cause him to devote considerable space, in the March, 1877, issue, to a denial not only of his own but also of all Russia's anti-Semitism ("I know that upon reading this the Jews will forthwith start screaming that this is a lie"), a justification for what anti-Semitism might exist ("not because of some racial or religious hate, but . . . from other causes of which not the native people but the Jew himself is guilty") and a somewhat complicated argument of obscure relevance, from the question, "How would it be if in Russia there were not three million Jews, but three million Russians, and there were eighty million Jews—well, into what would they convert the Russians and how would they treat them?" But it seems unprofitable to do more than mention this matter here, the more as this attitude and tone are by no means confined to the Jew but are extended liberally and impartially to the Roman Church, the Turks, kulaks, most of Europe and a

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

great many "Europeanizing" Russians. The dead, having recorded their own querulousness, are presumably free of ours.

A word here about the translation. It is fashionable these days to sneer at Constance Garnett's versions of the novels, and as I don't know Russian I cannot defend her accuracy against, for example, Mr. Vladimir Nabokov's attack (in his book on Gogol). But surely her English is superior to what we have here, to Mr. Brasol's generous and exotic use of the comma, to his participial constructions that again and again—perhaps, to be sure, in the interest of a literal rendering—reduce us to a kind of continuing present reminiscent of a comic turn at Minsky's ("Let noble Goldstein be dying for the Slavic idea"). It would be impertinent to commend Mr. Brasol for his industry in carrying to completion this lengthy and doubtless difficult task, but I do not think it possible to commend very highly his art.

At one time, as Jane Austen among others makes clear, fiction was not highly regarded as a vehicle of "serious" ideas, which were to be found in their proper place, in books of philosophy or theology or science. During the nineteenth century this attitude was corrected and revised as a necessary consequence of the work of many authors of whom Dostoievsky was one of greatest. Perhaps this revision, this correction, went too far, so that in the "interpretations" of our criticism works of fiction are regarded as pre-eminently the vehicles of "serious" ideas, and the imagination more than the intellect is seen as capable of presenting the enigma of the human condition; however that may be, it seems that the distinction between the two might clearly be demonstrated by a comparison of Dostoievsky's novels with his *Diary*. That would be an arduous exercise, and one for which I am not well qualified, but I should like to try in a few words at least to formulate such a distinction.

It is remarked in the *Poetics* that poetry is superior to history because it deals in the general and enduring rather than the particular and expedient; the way in which it does so (e. g. through examples and images, through the particular if not the expedient) may be a little elaborated upon in the present connection.

The novels of Dostoievsky maintain a tension between the naturalistic and the symbolic, between, if you like, appearance and reality. It cannot be doubted that they are representational and conceived of as such by the author (as will be shown, for example, by the remark on Stepan Trofimovich quoted above, or by the first footnote to *Notes From Underground*), it cannot be doubted either that they are parables and conceived of as such by the author (the Russian soul, the Karamazov soul, the epigraphs to *The Possessed*). In the *Diary*, though its preoccupations are deeply similar to those of the novels, though we hear the voices of Zossima, of Tikhon, of Myshkin, of Ivan (espe-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

cially of Ivan, I think), and a little, perhaps, the voices of Karmazinov, of Rakitin, of the man from underground and even, querulous, of Foma Fomitch Opiskin, this fruitful tension cannot be maintained: the tentative and balanced establishment of intricate relations, the penetration of idea by life which is like mercy tempering judgment and can compassionate the criminal and the fool even in the acts of denunciation and mockery—give way to the direct, the hortatory, the violent and extreme. The *Diary,* though its attitudes are in many essentials attitudes strongly and even fervently recommended in the novels and even by the novels, issues as an act of the will not the imagination—it is full of violent controversy (in tones even more pungent than some lately heard in our periodicals), of all but endless self-justifications, explanations of attitudes, explanations of the explanations, sneers at opponents, sarcasm of an outstandingly simple and tedious sort.

I suppose that this is only what journalism is, and that my remarks reflect merely my disappointment that it should be so even here, in the work of so great a master; and yet the disappointment in this work may prove an illumination in other respects. For here, in the *Diary,* one gets some impression of the raw energy, the violence and extremity, the chaos which this mind ordered into art. Without the form imposed by art this passion and rage seem ridiculous, directed upon the particular and expedient; but without this passion and rage there could have been no form. That one must have both, Dostoievsky was not unaware even in the *Diary,* where he casually and in quite another connection composes the tension I have tried to outline into the following not irrelevant fable.

"A vessel is carried with some precious vivifying liquid. But presently some people get up on their feet and begin to shout: 'Blind men! Why do you kiss the vessel?—It is only the content, and not the container, that is precious; you are kissing glass, mere glass; you are adoring a vessel; you are attributing all the holiness to glass, so that you are forgetting its precious content! Idolators! Throw away the vessel! Break it! Worship only the liquid, and not the glass!' And they break the vessel and the vivifying liquid, the precious content, is spilled on the earth and, of course, vanishes there."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

New Directions Books

The Rock Pool

CYRIL CONNOLLY

The brilliant editor of HORIZON is also a first-rate novelist in this satire on a decadent artists' colony on the French Riviera. $1.50

Volume Two

JOSÉ GARCIA VILLA

Villa's curious "comma poems" are sure to be hotly debated. His first book since the highly praised HAVE COME, AM HERE.
Signed edition $7.50
Trade edition $3.00

Selected Poems

EZRA POUND

A choice of Pound's best verse, ranging from the early lyrics and epigrams through the translations from many languages to the great epic CANTOS. His PISAN CANTOS is the winner of the Bollingen Award for the best poetry of 1948. $1.50

Selected Poems

WILLIAM CARLOS WILLIAMS

For some years the collected poems of this important modern poet have been out of print. Now a selection of his finest work in the shorter forms, with an introduction by Randall Jarrell, is offered in the New Classics Series. $1.50

A Commentary on Goethe's Faust

D. J. ENRIGHT

A scene-by-scene analysis of the philosophical themes and character development in Goethe's classic drama. $1.50

Goethe's World

A copiously illustrated volume on Goethe, the man, and the social climate in which he moved. Edited by Berthold Biermann from diaries, letters, memoirs, conversations and Goethe's own autobiographical writings. $5.00

333 SIXTH AVENUE • NEW YORK 14, N. Y.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Books to
live with . . .

THE GOLDEN NIGHTINGALE

By Donald A. Stauffer

"This study of poetry in terms of the later lyrics of Yeats is sure to interest all readers who care to cultivate an intelligent perception of poetic values. It is a timely addition to the shelf of reliable criticism."—GEORGE F. WHICHER, *New York Herald Tribune* $3.00

The Strange Life of AUGUST STRINDBERG

By Elizabeth Sprigge

"Miss Sprigge has found the exact title for her balanced and fascinating biography. (She is) civilized enough to respect Strindberg and let him stand on his own feet amid the clutter of his achievements and barbarities."—BROOKS ATKINSON, *New York Times* $3.50

THE RIVER LINE

By Charles Morgan

A new novel, dealing with the guilt and violences of our age. ". . . it is a simple reassurance to come upon work which exhibits consistently an intelligence and a quiet taste and a kind of philosophical integrity."—RICHARD SULLIVAN, *Chicago Sunday Tribune* $2.75

The London Book of ENGLISH VERSE

Selected by HERBERT READ and BONAMY DOBRÉE. A different, dynamic anthology designed to meet new standards of modern readers. From simple ballad to the more complex metaphysical and symphonic verse, the poetry is carefully arranged. 835 *pp.* $3.75

The London Book of ENGLISH PROSE

Selected by HERBERT READ and BONAMY DOBRÉE. Delightful as a leisure companion, but carefully designed to give penetrating insight into the thought and purpose of the literary prose artist. All the many kinds of prose amply represented. 665 *pp.* $3.75

The Macmillan Company Publishers

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED